

fine COOKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK

How to make
great Italian
meat sauces

Cooking with
portabellas

Quiche makes
a comeback

Shaping and
baking classic
dinner rolls

Quick
quesadilla

Four homey
apple desserts



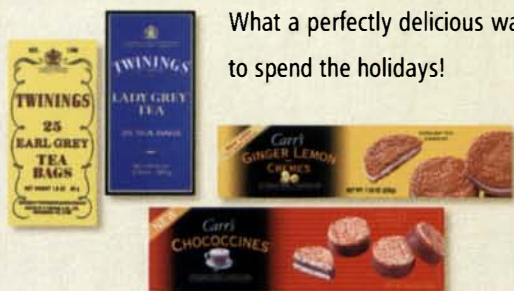
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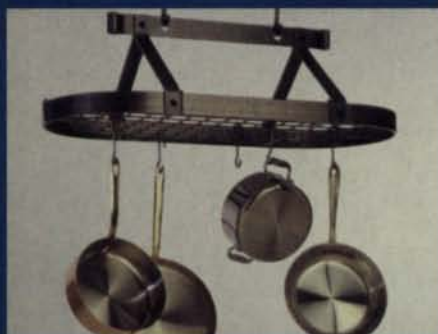
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56 Explore the best ways to use portabellas—braised, seared, roasted, or stuffed with delicious fillings.

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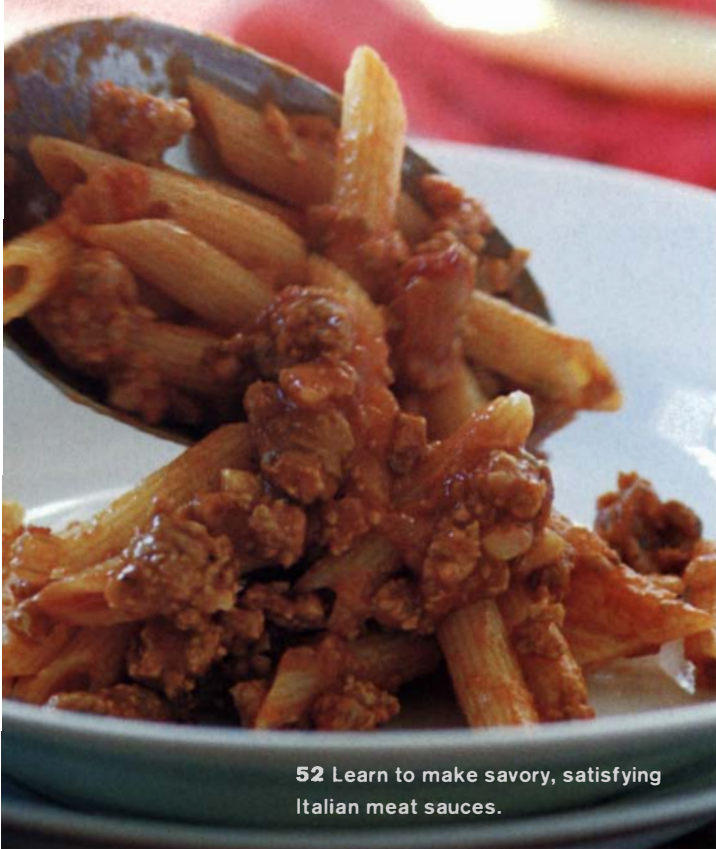
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www.finecooking.com

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by Gordon Hamersley

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visit our web site: www.finecooking.com

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by Perla Meyers

A buttery crust, rich custard, and gutsy fillings make the savory tart a rediscovered favorite

65 Master Class: Sole & Scallop Timbales

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Layers of sole and scallop mousse baked in a mold—topped with a satiny sauce and a dab of caviar—make a knockout first course

70 Three Sweet Breads from One Simple Dough

by Maggie Glezer

Make a butter cake, a chocolate braid, or cinnamon “chrysanthemums,” all from the same yeast-risen dough

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by Joanne McAllister Smart

Having a few on hand makes food prep safer and more efficient

76 Baking Homey Apple Desserts

by Kathleen Stewart

Use a sweet-tart apple that holds its shape, and don’t bother with the lemon juice

On the cover: Thanksgiving Dinner, p. 42.

Cover photos, Scott Phillips.

These pages: top left, Judi Rutz; above, Martha Holmberg; below, Joanne Smart; bottom left, Scott Phillips.



76 Celebrate apple season with brown betties, ginger cakes, turnovers, and crisps.



Kathleen Stewart ("Apple Desserts," p. 76), a frequent contributor to *Fine Cooking*, runs the Downtown Bakery & Creamery in Healdsburg, California. Before heading up to Healdsburg in 1987, she worked at Chez Panisse in Berkeley for twelve years. She is among the cadre of fabulous bakers—Flo Braker, Fran Gage, David Lebovitz, Alice Medrich, Peter Reinhart, and Carolyn Weil among them—working on a book called *The Collective Wisdom of the Baker's Dozen*.

Five contributors collaborated on our Thanksgiving menu ("A Stellar Thanksgiving," p. 42). **Beth Dooley** teaches cooking and writes for "The Splendid Table," a Minneapolis Public Radio program.

Lucia Watson is the chef-owner of Lucia's Restaurant, an American-style bistro in Minneapolis. Friends who enjoy cooking together, Beth and Lucia wrote *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland* (Knopf). **Molly Stevens**, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking* and a cooking teacher, is the author of *New England*, part of the Williams-Sonoma New American Cooking Series (Time-Life). **John Martin Taylor**, a former culinary bookstore owner in Charleston, South Carolina, writes books about southern cooking and sells his private-label products on his web site, www.hoppinjohns.com. **Carole Walter** teaches baking classes around the country and is the author of *Great Pies & Tarts* and *Great Cakes* (Clarkson Potter).

French-born **Isabelle Alexandre** ("Vegetable Compotes," p. 49) last wrote for *Fine Cooking* on sear-roasting (#31). Back then, she was executive chef at Pastis restaurant in San Francisco, where her cooking got rave reviews. Isabelle left the Bay Area late last year to return to Europe; she's now executive sous-chef at Hôtel Le Meridien in Lisbon, Portugal.

Suzette Gresham-Tognetti ("Ragùs," p. 52) may have married into an Italian family, but her cooking shows she already had Italy in her soul. As chef and co-owner of Acquerello in San Francisco, Suzette is constantly garnering high praise for her

contemporary interpretations of traditional Italian dishes. To celebrate the restaurant's recent tenth anniversary, Suzette and co-owner Giancarlo Paterlini hosted a seven-course dinner honoring the regular customers to whom they owe their success, after which they received a standing ovation from those well-fed guests.



Gordon Hamersley ("Portaballas," p. 56) began his cooking career in Boston, where he now owns Hamersley's Bistro with his wife, Fiona.

While attending Boston University in the 1970s, he trained at various French restaurants. After stints in the '80s at Ma Maison in Los Angeles, where Wolfgang Puck was chef, living in Nice, and working as sous-chef to Lydia Shire at the Bostonian Hotel, Gordon and Fiona opened Hamersley's Bistro in 1987. In 1994, they moved their restaurant to its current larger space located at the Boston Center for the Arts in the South End, where Gordon continues to impress critics and loyal patrons with his French-inspired fare made with the best of New England's ingredients.



Born in Austria and raised in Spain, cooking teacher and author **Perla Meyers** ("Quiche," p. 60) first developed her passion for cooking while living in Geneva and

working for the United Nations. She attended the Ecole Hôtelière in Lausanne, the Hotel Sacher in Vienna, and the Cordon Bleu in Paris. Her first cookbook, *The Seasonal Kitchen*, launched her writing career with a bang, garnering three awards and many accolades when it was published in 1973. A copy of it is in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent design collection. When Perla isn't at home in New York teaching or writing cookbooks—her most recent include *Fresh from the Garden* (Clarkson Potter) and *The Spur of the Moment Cook* (William Morrow)—she keeps her cooking skills fresh by spending several weeks a year working alongside groundbreaking chefs in Europe's most exciting restaurants.



This has been a big year for **Daniel Patterson** ("Seafood Timbale," p. 65): in January, he and his wife, Elisabeth Ramsey, opened Elisabeth

Daniel, their new restaurant in downtown San Francisco, to great acclaim. Daniel started working in restaurants when he was 14; he spent much of his youth travelling in France and reading classic French cookbooks. Daniel's cooking, inspired by a passion for traditional French technique and tip-top ingredients, has earned him a stellar reputation. Previously, he was the chef-owner of Babette's in Sonoma, California.



Maggie Glezer ("Sweet Breads," p. 70) teaches and writes about bread-making. She's the author of *Artisan Breadmaking across America* (due out

this October from Artisan Books). An American Institute of Baking Certified Baker, Maggie has written technical columns for the Bread Baker's Guild of America as well as King Arthur Flour's Baking Sheet. She lives in Atlanta.

Joanne McAllister Smart ("Cutting Boards," p. 74) is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*.



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A delicious mix-up

I'm writing in response to the "Condensed milk vs. evaporated milk" section of your Basics column in *Fine Cooking* #38, (p. 79). On one Thanksgiving morning, while making a pumpkin pie according to the recipe on the can of pumpkin, I mistakenly added condensed milk instead of the called-for evaporated milk. Soon realizing my error from the thickness of the mixture, I looked around the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of brandy. I added maybe ½ to ¾ cup and threw the pie in the oven. The mistake produced the best pumpkin pie I'd ever made, and since then it's the only way I ever make it.

—Carole Aleo,
Grass Valley, CA

Care for a side of purslane with that corn?

I read with some amusement the piece on salad greens and mesclun (*Fine Cooking* #39 p. 78), which lists other edible plants such as purslane. If purslane is indeed a delectable addition to summer salads,

then the Idaho Falls Community Gardens surely have a corner on the market. I just pulled two 5-gallon buckets of these invasive plants from my corn patch!

—Kimmon C. Richards,
via e-mail

Mexican ice creams get an authentic sweet touch

Jim Peyton's article and recipes for ice cream are superb (*Fine Cooking* #40, p. 52). I tried two recipes in quick order and found both rich in texture and intriguing in flavor.

While I appreciated the "Make your own *cajeta*" sidebar, I'm interested to know if Mr. Peyton has come across a recipe for the real thing using goat's milk. I attempted my own *cajeta* using 1 quart goat's milk to 1½ cups sugar. The result was delicious and had the rich undertones of goat's milk (I used this *cajeta* in the *Crema Morisca* for half the sugar in the recipe, to outstanding results). Once cooled, though, my *cajeta* was hard and crystalline (though it melted fine in my ice cream base).

—Donna J. Kapa,
Staten Island, NY

More *cajeta*, please

Thanks for the great ice cream recipes and tips. Another way to make *cajeta* would be to take an unopened tin of sweetened condensed milk and plunge it into boiling water. Boil gently for four hours. No stirring needed! When cool, place the (unopened) tin back in the cupboard. Instant *cajeta* when you are ready for it.

—Blair Mackenzie,
Toronto, Ontario

Editors' note: We tried this in our kitchens and found that it

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As you begin work on your Thanksgiving meal this year, take a moment to visit our web site and look at the recipes, advice, technique photos, and videos we've gathered from past issues of the magazine. Brush up on gravy-making, calculate how much turkey per person, find a source for a fresh bird, dare to make a lattice-topped apple pie!

Go to www.finecooking.com and click on the Thanksgiving icon for a directory of our best Thanksgiving advice.

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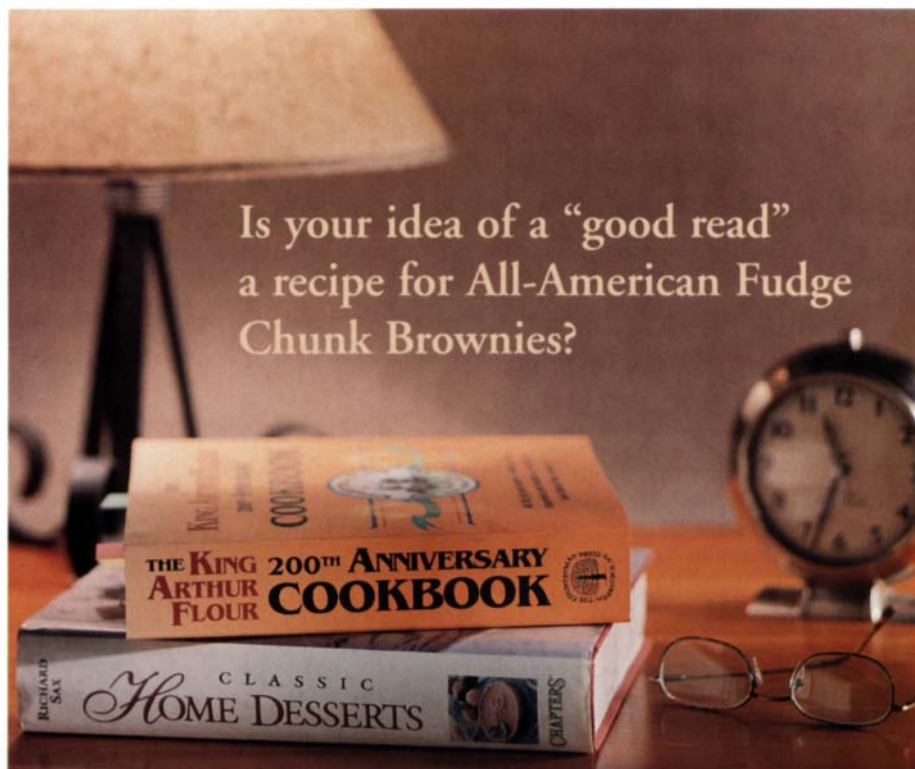
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worked quite well. The sweetened condensed milk darkened and thickened into a delicious *cajeta*. One additional tip: If you set the can on its side, it won't rattle noisily while it's boiling.

Powdered buttermilk does the trick

In response to the question concerning buttermilk in the Q&A section of *Fine Cooking* #40 (p. 13), I offer the following solution for those who do not use buttermilk fast enough to warrant keeping it on hand: use powdered buttermilk. It keeps quite nicely in the refrigerator or freezer without losing its cooking properties or taste. Other than the cook, who really has to know?

—Charles McEniry,
Stoughton, WI

Editors' note: We've tried Saco Cultured Buttermilk Blend brand in pancakes, and loved the results. To find out where you can buy it near you, go to www.sacofoods.com. King Arthur's Baker's Catalogue (800/827-6836 or www.kingarthurflour.com) also sells a powdered buttermilk.

Weigh to go

I just wanted to let you know that my products have turned out so much better since I have switched from measuring by volume with measuring

Care to join our California tour?

We have a few spots available on our visit to Napa and Sonoma valleys, October 19–22. Here's what some of last year's participants said about the tour:

♦ "Outstanding experience! The CIA and artisan food tour were world-class. *Fine Cooking* staff and HMS were terrific, ensuring the trip ran smoothly."

♦ "Anyone who likes to cook, to eat great food, to drink fine wine, and who enjoys sharing these pleasures with great people will love this trip. Great job."

♦ "The CIA experience was a lifelong dream for a nonprofessional chef. Thanks for the opportunity."

See p. 28 for information on getting a detailed brochure.

cups to measuring by weight, using a scale. Thank you so much for your help.

By the way, I love your magazine, it is just fabulous. I tell people about it every chance I get. I also find your web site helpful, especially the recipe index. Since we started getting *Fine Cooking*, we've ordered all the back issues available.

—Suzan Putman,
Nolensville, TN



...around the country

Check out our calendar of events. If we're in your neighborhood, please come see us.

September 8–10: *Fine Cooking* sponsors a Whisk Away Weekend with the New England Culinary Institute, at The Inn at Essex, Essex Junction, Vermont. Martha Holmberg, Susie Middleton, contributing editor Molly Stevens, and frequent contributor Leslie Revsin teach cooking classes. Info: contact Debbie Tegen at 802/764-1490 or debbiet@neci.edu.

November 11–16: *Fine Cooking* contributing editor Molly Stevens teaches classes at Sur la Table stores in Los Gatos, California (11/11), Kirkland, Washington (11/13 and 14), Newport Beach, California (11/15), and Santa Monica, California (11/16). Info: 408/395-6946 (Los Gatos); 425/827-1311 (Kirkland); 949/640-0200 (Newport Beach); 310/395-0390 (Santa Monica).

Plus: Jennifer Bushman demonstrates recipes from the pages of *Fine Cooking* on her "Nothing to It" television segments, airing on selected NBC and Fox stations in Nevada, Arizona, Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho.

Editors' note: We're glad to hear that other cooks are experiencing the joys of weighing ingredients. Using a scale is a great way to get more consistent results in baking and pastry recipes. While we always test our recipes using both volume measurements and weight, and we list both in the ingredient lists (weight first, volume second), we—and our professional contribu-

tors—really recommend using a scale to weigh flour, cocoa powder, ground nuts, and other ingredients that can be variable when scooped into a cup. For information on using scales, see *Fine Cooking* #17, p. 62, and #13, p. 68.

Cool ideas for hot-smoked salmon

In *Fine Cooking* #40, the article on smoked salmon (p. 61)

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LETTERS

implied that the salmon skin might stick to the grill as you tried to remove it. I find that if I spray the grill wires liberally with PAM, the fillets come free easily. Also, the formation of the pellicle (the dried, protective layer on the flesh) can be speeded up by placing the racks of fish in front of a good fan, thereby drying them out faster and in less time.

I have been smoking all sorts of things for the past 35 years, and I've found that the Luhr-Jensen "Big Chief" smoker does a great job without all the fuss of building one from scratch. It has a 450-watt heating coil and will hold about 20 pounds of fish.

By the way, hot smoked salmon stays tasty in the freezer for at least six months.

—Len Pincus,
via e-mail

Taking responsibility for your trash

I thought your article "How to Cater Your Own Big Party" (*Fine Cooking* #37, p. 58) was excellent. I got some good tips from the article.

I was disappointed, however, to see the sidebar that recommended tossing all the trash in a 30-gallon bag. It's no more trouble to hang up several bags—for plastics, metals, glass, etc.—and sort the stuff as you work, or use plastic crates and move them right out to the garage when you're finished. A cook who's organized enough to follow all the steps for party planning laid out in the article can surely put together a responsible plan to deal with recycling, too.

—Amy De La Hunt,
Stuttgart, Germany ♦

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat up; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the time given in the recipe; use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ♦ Butter is unsalted.
- ♦ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ♦ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ♦ Sugar is granulated.
- ♦ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ♦ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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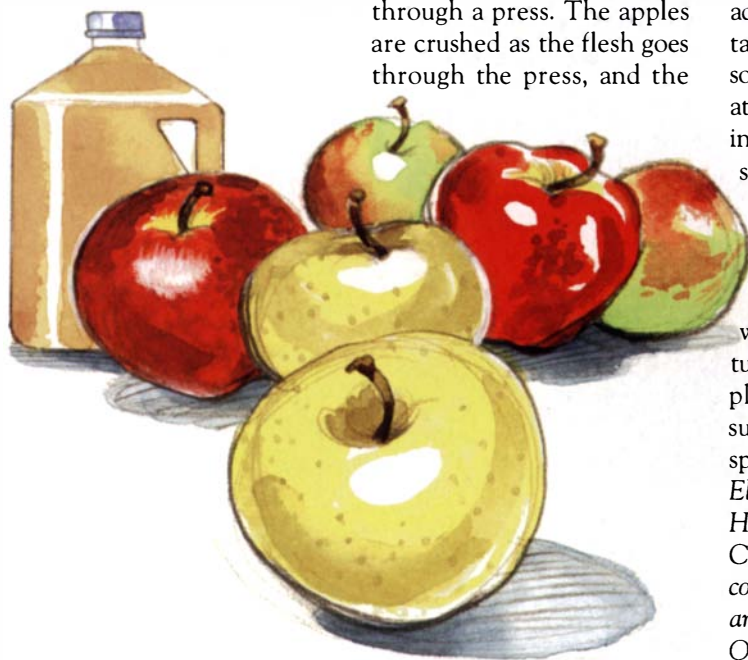


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Have a question of general interest about cooking?

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Making apple cider

Can I make apple cider at home with a blender or a juicer, or do I need a cider press? How can I preserve cider so it doesn't start to ferment?

—Meeghen Eaton,
Burnaby, British Columbia

Elizabeth Ryan replies: Sweet apple cider is traditionally made by forcing whole apples through a press. The apples are crushed as the flesh goes through the press, and the

cloudy, autumn-brown liquid that emerges is cider. Puréeing fresh apples in a blender would give you a lot of solids and pulp and not a whole lot of liquid—a delicious slushy drink perhaps, but not what farmers call apple cider. A vegetable juicer that separates out the pulp gives much better results. One drawback to both of these methods is that the juice is unstable and will soon separate (though cider from a juicer will be fine for a day or two).

To make traditional apple cider, which has a longer shelf life, you could buy a home cider making kit (see Sources, p. 86); they usually cost \$300 to \$500. If you have an apple

tree in your back yard, a small cider press can be a great investment. (For health reasons, use only apples from the tree, never those on the ground.)

Sweet cider (as opposed to alcoholic hard cider, which is made by letting sweet cider ferment) doesn't last more than a week or two in the refrigerator. Commercial producers pasteurize the juice or add preservatives such as potassium sorbate (or do both) so it lasts longer. Pasteurizing at home would require checking pH levels and obtaining safety procedures from the USDA. There's a much easier way to extend a cider's shelf life: freeze it. Cider freezes beautifully with very little impact on texture and flavor. I freeze it in plastic containers, making sure there's an inch or so of air space to allow for expansion. *Elizabeth Ryan is the CEO of Hudson Valley Draft Cider Company (hudsonvalleycider.com) in Staatsburg, New York, and the owner of Breezy Hill Orchard & Cider Mill, which produces fresh sweet and European style hard cider.*

Using malt in bread dough

What is dough conditioner? I've seen it in bread recipes, just as I've seen malt.

—Fred Lucia, Wallingford, CT

Maggie Glezer replies: Dough conditioner is a catch-all term for the hundreds of additives used in commercial baking, primarily for white bread. Among other things, dough conditioners can make bread stronger for shipping, softer and whiter, or slower to stale. For example, the stearyl lactylates add strength (to pre-

vent crushing during shipping) and softness (to counter staleness). The most infamous conditioner, potassium bromate, helps prevent doughs from collapsing during proofing, but it is also thought to be a carcinogen. Strict labeling laws in California have made its use rare.

The great majority of these additives aren't used—and shouldn't be used—by artisan and home breadbakers. Our bread doesn't need a three-week shelf life, and we don't care how our doughs hold up to conveyor-belt jiggling. We use minimal amounts of yeast, long, slow fermentations, and pre-ferments, such as sourdough starter, *poolishes*, and *bigas*, for breads that are easier to shape, better tasting, and longer lasting.

A few conditioners, however, are useful to home bakers, particularly if they're using organic flours. Malt is a great example, specifically diastatic malted barley flour (*diastatic* means it is rich in alpha-amylase, an enzyme that helps break down carbohydrates into simpler sugars for fermentation). Most flours from large mills are supplemented with the proper amount of malted barley flour. Organic flours, however, are rarely supplemented. Very small amounts of diastatic malted barley flour added to organic flour in a bread recipe will promote a darker crust, improve the texture of the crumb, and increase the bread's oven spring.

You don't need much. Start with about ½ teaspoon of malted barley flour per cup (4½ ounces) of flour; if your bread turns out gummy, cut back to ¼ teaspoon. You can buy diastatic malted barley flour from breadbaking supply

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*Nutritional information available upon request.



Steak Au Poivre

2-8 oz. bison, ostrich or elk tenderloins	1 shot dry sherry
2 tsp. fresh cracked peppercorns	2 tsp. salt
Tabasco sauce	2 Tbsp. minced garlic
4 Tbsp. unsalted butter	1 tsp. black pepper
1 cup chopped green onion	3/4 cup beef broth
3 dashes Worcestershire sauce	2-3 Tbsp. Demi-Glace
3-5 dashes Tabasco sauce	(or other thickening agent)
1/3 heavy whipping cream	

Chop green onions first, set aside.

Cut tenderloins into 3/4 inch thick medallions. Press fresh cracked peppercorn into each medallion and add a dash of Tabasco sauce to each, or to taste.

Put salt into frying pan and heat to medium-high. Brown one side of medallions approx. 1 minute to rare-medium-rare. Flip steaks immediately adding butter in the same pan. Remove the meat after approx. 1 minute and set aside in a warmer plate. Note: Steaks will continue to cook, care should be taken to avoid overcooking.

In the same frying pan add: onion, garlic, Tabasco sauce, black pepper, Worcestershire sauce and 1/4 cup beef broth, stirring constantly. When sauce has condensed and onions are heated, add the sherry, remaining broth and cream. Stir until mixed. Add thickening agent to add body. Place medallions on a serving plate and ladle sauce over the meat.

Serve with wild rice if desired.

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Q&A

catalogs (see Sources, p. 86). Lora Brody's Bread Dough Enhancer is a type of dough conditioner; it contains diastatic malt powder, ascorbic acid for dough strength, and wheat gluten for a bigger loaf.

Malt syrup is not considered a dough conditioner but rather a sweetener; it adds rich flavor and caramel color.

Maggie Glezer is the author of Artisan Baking across America (Artisan Books).

Buying the best turkey

Is there any way to judge before buying whether a turkey is young and fresh and whether it has been stored properly?

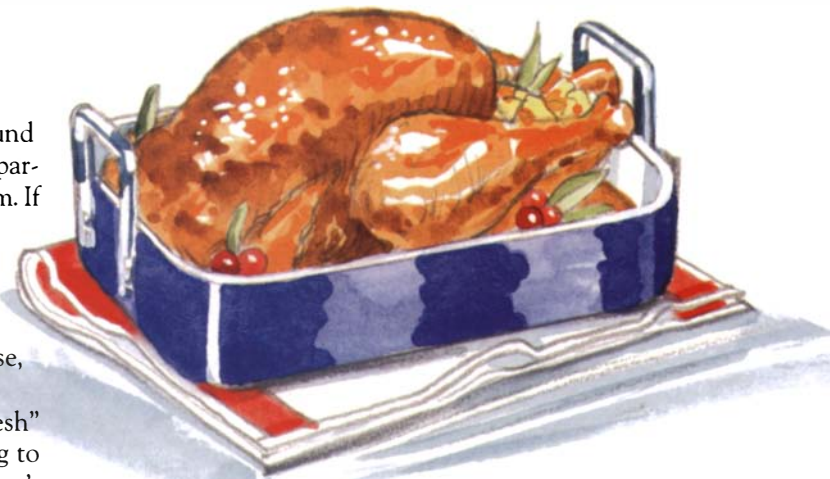
—Clara Waters, Lincoln, NE

Stanley Lobel replies: If you're buying a frozen turkey packed in a nontransparent bag, there's not a whole lot you

can do except grope around the contours of the bird, particularly toward the bottom. If you feel chunks of ice, or if the shape is sharp rather than smooth, the bird has likely been defrosted and then refrozen. In that case, select another bird.

If you're buying a "fresh" turkey (which, according to labeling laws, means it hasn't been chilled below 26°F), you will again want to feel around the bottom, but this time you're checking for liquid in the bag—a telltale sign that the bird was frozen at one time and later defrosted, not a good thing. For any turkey packaged in a bag, look for punctures in the bag, especially around the wing tip area; if you see any, move on.

You can find out a lot more about a turkey if it isn't already



sealed in a bag. A young bird will have light-colored, almost transparent skin with pinkish meat visible; it shouldn't be scaly or coarse. The legs will be short and stocky, not long and narrow, and the breast will be full, broad and rounded, not pointy and sloped.

Stanley Lobel, president of Lobel's Prime Meat Market in New York City, answers questions about meat and poultry at www.lobels.com.

Horseradish with more bite

I'm forever buying new jars of horseradish because it seems to lose its kick so fast. How long is it supposed to last? Also, we grow our own horseradish root, but sometimes it's not very spicy. Is there a peak season for growing it?

—Judy Meier, Redding, CA

Dave Latter replies: After three months, jarred horse-

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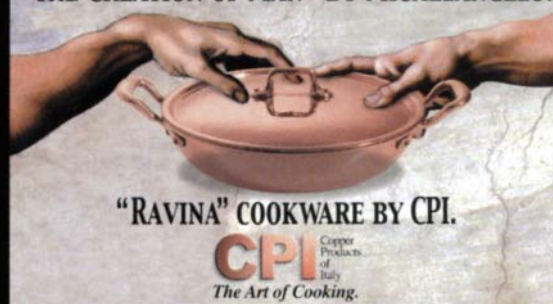


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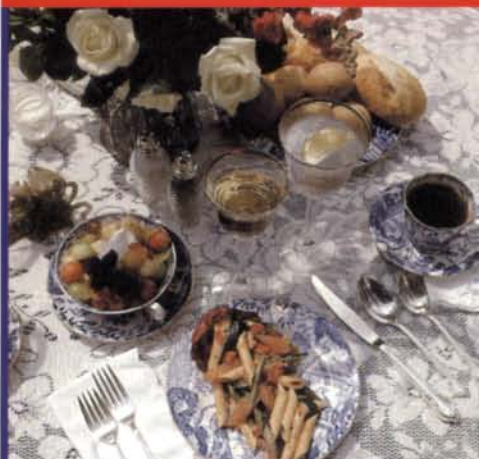
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radish should still have some bite; after six months, much less. And at nine months, you'll accuse us of having put turnips in the jar, not horseradish. I frequently receive letters from consumers asking whether we have varying heat levels in our products. The answer is no. The degree of pungency you experience is inversely related to how long ago the root was grated. In other words, horseradish starts to lose its potency from the moment it's grated. We can slow the reaction that's responsible for this diminishing heat in a few ways—by adding vinegar, storing it in a glass jar, adding a fat like oil or cream, and keeping it refrigerated—but nothing halts it entirely.

To get the most kick from prepared horseradish, buy from a shop with good turn-

over, staying away from horseradish that has darkened (it's old), and eat it within a few months of opening. But for the strongest hit, nothing beats buying a fresh root, grating it yourself, and using it within 24 hours.

As for seasonality, horseradish growers usually plant in the spring and then harvest in the fall after a "killing frost." The frost is critical because it kills the greens and that's what sets the heat in the root. You can harvest the root right away or leave it in the ground until spring. To my taste, spring-harvested horseradish has more zing.

Dave Latter is a member of the Horseradish Information Council and the chairman of Morehouse Foods, which has been making prepared horseradish for 80 years.

Trimming Silpat baking mats

I'd like to use Silpat nonstick pan liners for baking, but the ones I've seen are too big for my small pans. Can I cut them to fit?

—Mandy Littleton, Santa Rosa, CA

Eliane Feiner replies: Silpat nonstick baking mats should not be cut or folded. The mats are made of glass fiber and covered with nonstick silicon, making them perfect for baking cookies and pastry, or for working with sticky food like taffy or caramel. The glass fiber gives the mat some rigidity to help it keep its shape.

Cutting the mat wouldn't immediately damage it, but it would eventually fray along the severed edge. You may have noticed that the borders of the mats are a different

color; this reinforcement is added precisely to prevent fraying. Folding a Silpat would break the glass fibers, shortening the life of the mat.

Silpats are available in several sizes. The most popular is 11½x16½ inches, but we now offer a smaller 11¾x8¼-inch mat. The mats are sold through many kitchen shops and catalogs (see Sources, p. 86).

To store the mats, keep them flat or gently roll them up, being careful not to cause creases. I leave mine right in the pan and make sure not to set anything else on top of it. You can also hang them, either with clothespins or with binder clips, hooking the clips on nails or hooks.

Eliane Feiner is a sales manager for Demarle, which manufactures Silpat baking liners. ♦

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Choosing a Good Head of Garlic



If you like strong garlic, **Spanish Roja**, a Rocambole, is for you. It also contains high amounts of allicin, the compound in garlic believed to be an immune-system booster.

Although you tend to see one or two basic varieties of garlic at the supermarket, hundreds of strains exist, some of which you might see at a farmers' market or a garlic farm near you. They have differences in strength and nuance, and all are wonderfully pungent.

Here's how garlic is cultivated, how to choose a good bulb at the market, and how to keep it fresh once you get it home.



Garlic scapes grow from the stalk of hardneck garlic. Scapes come in at the beginning of June. Garlic scapes have a fresh flavor that's milder than a garlic clove; they're delicious used just as you would garlic cloves.

Hardneck and soft

Garlic farmers cultivate two kinds of garlic: hardneck and softneck.

Hardneck garlic grows in northern regions with harsh winters. Bulbs (also called heads) normally have six to eight uniform cloves growing around a hard center shaft,

and their size is more regular than the cloves found in many softneck strains. There are three types of hardneck: Rocambole (roh-cam-BOH-lee) garlic, which has tan or white skin around the bulb and various amounts of purple streaking; porcelain garlic, which has white outer skin with little or no purple coloration; and purple-striped garlic.

The cloves of hardneck garlic have a brownish skin with varying amounts of purple, depending on the variety. The skins are thick and easy to peel.

Hardneck garlic grows until the ground freezes and then rests until the mild weather returns.

Softneck garlic grows year-round in climates where the winters are mild, such as southern California, Florida, and the southeastern U.S., as well as Israel, Italy, and parts of Asia. Cloves grow in a cluster, with anywhere from 12 to 24 cloves per bulb. There are

two types of softneck: artichoke and silverskin. In many varieties of softneck, cloves are irregularly shaped. The bulbs have a covering of thin, pale skin, while the cloves' skin can range in color from rusty red to pale brown. As with hardneck, the flavor of softneck garlic can run from mild to very hot.

Garlic is a hardy plant

A garlic plant can thrive just about anywhere except very extreme conditions. I've dropped garlic cloves in my back yard and found healthy garlic growing there the following year.

In the harsher climates where hardneck garlic grows best, planting is usually done in late September or October. In regions with mild winters, which is where softneck thrives, planting and harvesting are done almost year-round.

One garlic clove spawns a bulb. Cloves are planted about three inches deep into



Inchelium Red Artichoke is a softneck variety. Milder than silverskin, it's good in salads and other dishes that call for raw garlic.



Marino, a Rocambole, is milder than Spanish Roja and slightly sweet. I think it goes especially well with basil; Marino is a great garlic for pesto.



Nootka Rose Silverskin, another softneck variety, has small, overlapping cloves. Nootka Rose is on the full-flavored side. Its small cloves are good in stir-fries and for studding roasts.

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AT THE MARKET



Elephant garlic isn't really a garlic at all, but a member of the leek family. Mild-flavored with a hint of onion, it's best roasted and makes great soup.

Music, which we call **Prussian White**, is a porcelain garlic. A little sweeter than other porcelain, it's very good with fish and chicken.



the ground with the root end set into the soil. When planting, garlic farmers save the healthiest, best cloves—those with no mutations—for planting next year's crop.

Garlic needs curing

At harvest, garlic is hung in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place to cure for three to five weeks before going to market.

Curing dries the bulb and brings out additional flavor. As a bulb of garlic cures and matures, the cloves' papery skin turns darker. At our farm, we hang the whole plant bulb side down so that juices from the stalk travel to the bulb, bringing the best flavor. (Many growers cut off the tops and lay the garlic on screens; although this speeds curing, I believe there's a sacrifice in flavor, and I think our method is why our garlic tastes so good.)


When the first skin can be removed by sliding your thumb over the bulb, the garlic is cured.

At the market, look for garlic with a very firm head. Avoid bulbs that are dried out or have soft spots or mold. Green shoots in a bulb are a sign of internal growth in

the clove; it's an indication of old garlic. And as with other produce, bigger doesn't necessarily mean better. Varieties vary in size, and many people find that a smaller bulb of garlic has more flavor than a larger one.

Store garlic in a cool, dry place. For just a few heads, a ventilated ceramic container or garlic keeper is perfect. If you buy a large amount of garlic, hang it in a mesh sack in your basement or garage—as long as it's cool and dry there. Never store garlic in a plastic bag, and keep it out of the fridge, unless you have a low-humidity drawer.

Ruth Nosonowitz and her husband, David, grow organic garlic at La Terre Garlic Farm in Clinton Corners, New York. ♦




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full-time, Titcomb goes into their home and cooks 10 meals for the whole family. Her service includes grocery shopping, preparation, cooking, packaging and cleanup. With a cost as low as \$8 per meal, per person, Titcomb has a long waiting list. So what does it take to become a personal chef? "Organization, persistence, a love of cooking and a little know how," says Titcomb. *For more information, call the United States Personal Chef Association at: 1-800-995-2138 or go to <http://www.uspca.com>.*

READER SERVICE NO. 35

Shaping dinner rolls to look and taste their best

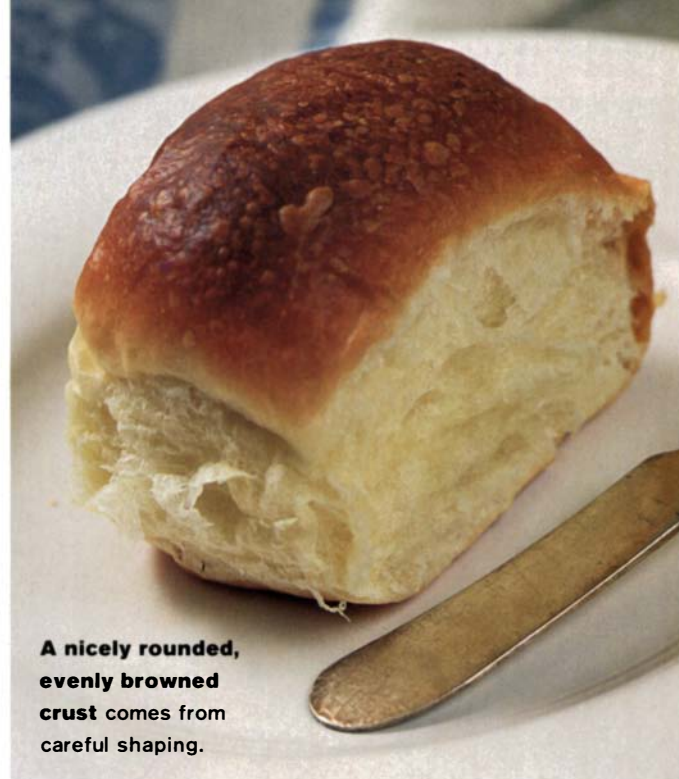
I make these dinner rolls often, but I especially like to serve them with Thanksgiving dinner. They have a subtle, comforting flavor that goes well with all those different flavors on the table, as well as a light texture that doesn't fill you up the way more dense breads and rolls can. These soft, puffy rolls are also great for mopping up gravy.

The recipe for these rolls is very straightforward. The only part that may take practice is shaping the rolls into tight little balls so that they come out with a nice, uniform shape and a light, not doughy, interior.

If you have a stand mixer, the dough comes together

fast. Be aware, however, that even a 5-quart, heavy-duty mixer will dance a little as you knead the dough. Another tip for making the dough: use a thermometer to test the temperature of the butter and milk mixture—120°F is warmer than you think.

Weigh the dough to divide it evenly. This recipe makes 12 large or 16 medium rolls. Although I used to go with a dozen, I've decided I like the size of the 16 yield better, plus I often have that many people over at Thanksgiving. It isn't easy to divide the dough by sight, which is why I recommend weighing the pieces. For 12 rolls, divide the dough into 2¾-ounce pieces. For 16 rolls, each piece



A nicely rounded, evenly browned crust comes from careful shaping.

should weigh just a smidge over 2 ounces.

Shape the dough into tight balls

As you shape the rolls, you want to stretch the top of the dough ball while simultaneously sealing the bottom. The stretching helps the dough hold up to the expansion that occurs in the oven, while the

sealing prevents the roll from opening up while baking and becoming wrinkled and doughy on the bottom.

Keep one side up while you roll, and don't cup your hand. What you're not doing here is rolling a ball in the manner you would roll a ball of clay. Once you put a piece of dough in your hand, you want to keep the same side

Divide the dough evenly and shape it carefully



Use a pastry scraper to cut the dough into 16 pieces. For the best results, weigh each piece until you get the feel for them.



Start with the dough on a flattened palm. Use the outside of the other hand to rotate the dough while keeping the top side facing up.



Move your top hand from front to back and stay low on the ball as you turn the dough clockwise for righties, counterclockwise for lefties.

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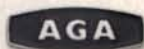
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facing up. The edge of the other hand then comes in along the bottom of the ball to rotate the dough ball, spinning it in place (see the photo on p. 24).



Examples, good and bad. The front ball, shown bottom up, has a good seal, while the ball in the back needs a few more rotations to seal those loose creases.

To avoid cupping and rolling the dough, keep the ball toward the back of your palm, near your thumb joint, and use just the edge of the other hand to rotate the ball. You'll want to continue turning the dough round and round like a top until the bottom looks completely sealed (see the photo comparison at left). Continue shaping until you have reached the desired result. Don't worry about overworking this dough.

As you work, keep the rest of the pieces covered in plastic wrap so they don't dry out. After shaping, put the dough balls, evenly spaced, into the greased pan; if you're making 16 rolls, the balls will be quite snug on the short side of the pan, which is fine. Proof the rolls for about half an hour and then bake. *(Recipe follows)*

Proof the rolls before baking



Arrange the shaped balls in a buttered baking dish. Space them evenly but note that they fit more snugly across the pan's short side.



Let the rolls rise until almost doubled. Once baked, these tightly packed rolls need to be pulled apart.

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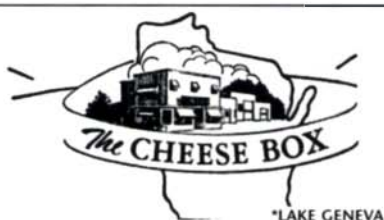
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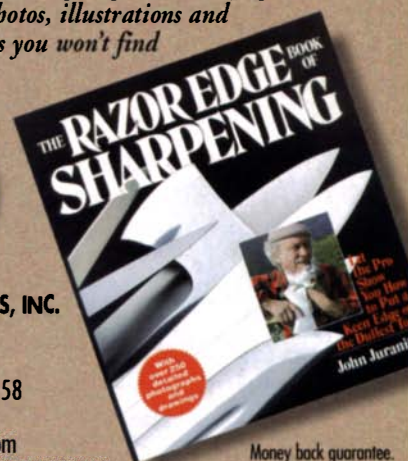


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Classic Dinner Rolls

You can make the dough and shape the rolls up to a day ahead of baking. Take the recipe to the point where the rolls are shaped and in the pan but not yet proofed and immediately refrigerate them. About half an hour before you're ready to bake, transfer them to a warm place to let them proof until almost doubled before baking them. *Yields 16 rolls.*

18 oz. (4 cups) all-purpose flour
1 package (2¼ tsp.) rapid-rise yeast
⅓ cup sugar
1 tsp. salt
1 cup milk
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter
3 large egg yolks

In a large bowl of an electric mixer, whisk together the flour, yeast, sugar, and salt. Put the bowl in the mixer stand and fit it with the dough hook.

In a small saucepan, heat the milk and butter, stirring un-

til the butter melts and the liquid is very warm, between 115° and 125°F.

Dump the warm milk-butter mixture and the egg yolks into the flour and mix on medium-low speed until combined. Increase the speed to medium high and beat until the dough is smooth and shiny, about 8 min.

(If you don't have a stand mixer, you can make a well with the dry ingredients, gradually add the wet, and then knead the dough by hand until smooth and shiny.)

Remove the dough from the bowl, shape it into a neat ball, and then return it to the bowl. Lightly grease the sides of the bowl and cover the top securely with plastic. Let rise in a warm spot until doubled in size, about 45 min.

Lightly grease a 9x13-inch baking dish. Turn the dough onto a clean work surface (no need to flour; the dough is soft but not sticky) and gently



The rolls are best eaten warm; gently pull them apart to serve.

press to deflate. Using a pastry scraper, divide the dough into 16 equal pieces, each about 2 oz. (use a scale to be sure).

Put a piece of dough in your palm (again, no flour). With the edge of your other palm (curved slightly), press gently but firmly on the dough, rotating it repeatedly until it forms a smooth-skinned ball with a sealed bottom (see the photos on p. 24). Put the ball in the pan, sealed side down, and repeat with the remaining dough.

Cover the pan with plastic and let the dough rise until almost doubled, about 30 min. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 375°F. Remove the plastic and bake the rolls until they're puffed and browned, about 20 min. Serve warm.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is the test kitchen director for Fine Cooking. Her most recent book, The Kid's Cookbook (Time-Life), is in bookstores now. ♦



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A baker finds her dream pastry brush

I'm not a pastry chef, but I do use a pastry brush for lots of cooking chores and to glaze the breads I bake. It's one of those little inexpensive tools with which I've never been happy. The higher quality brushes always seem to break, while the cheaper models absorb very little liquid and have a most annoying habit of shedding bristles (what a fun job—picking out those tiny bristles from the surface of a fully proofed and egg-washed bread).

But at a recent baking trade show, I wandered into the Braun Brush Company's booth and found my perfect pastry brush, for only \$7.20. This brush is crafted from a single piece of epoxy so there are no joints to split or to conceal grime. Three rows of tufted boar-hair bristles (or nylon for kosher kitchens) are embedded directly into the epoxy. The boar hair is very soft so it won't damage delicate

surfaces and will easily reach into tight spaces, and it's very absorbent, so it soaks up plenty of liquid for faster application. The 2-inch size is generous enough for home use, but for professionals it also comes in 3-inch (\$9.70) and 4-inch widths (\$12.80).

A caveat: Epoxy isn't dishwasher safe so the brush needs to be hand-washed. The neatest way to do this is to squirt detergent onto your hand and lather up the soap with the brush in the palm of your hand, swishing it vigorously to work the soap into the base of the bristles. Rinse the brush well, shaking it hard to remove excess water, and then let it thoroughly air-dry before storing it.

Contact Braun directly at 800/645-4111 or log on to www.brush.com.

—Maggie Glezer, author of
Artisan Baking Across
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Heidrun Mead is handmade bubbly

Mead, a drink made from fermenting honey and water, may be the original nip, predating both wine and beer—chances are you know about it from reading ancient mythology rather than from chatting up your local wine merchant. Mead is hard to find today, so I was glad to find out about Heidrun Sparkling Dry Mead, possibly

the world's only naturally sparkling mead. While most mead is cloying, what's so seductive about this one is that fermentation expands on honey's fragrant, woodsy nuances while restraining the sweetness. It's a treat to smell and taste all that in a glass of bubbly.

Heidrun crafts a few different meads that range in style, as each uses a different artisan honey. My favorite is the Wildflower, which is subtly sparkling and full of perfumy aromas and flavors. It's clean and light, slightly sweet, and has a dry finish. The mead is a delicious aperitif—try it with a nibble of smoked salmon—and it's great for dessert, too—delicious on its own or with fruit and nuts. It's a good match for Indian or Asian dishes with fragrant spice and a hint of sweetness (hot spice would overwhelm its subtle flavors).

Heidrun Sparkling Mead (\$16) is unfiltered, so transport will make it cloudy; the bottle will settle after a few days of standing upright. To order, call the meadery at 877/434-3786 or visit www.heidrunmeadery.com.

—Amy Albert, associate editor



Madagascar ground vanilla packs big flavor

Devoted bakers will want to know that ground vanilla, prized by professionals for its depth and intensity, is now available to home cooks, from Madagascar Select importers. (Madagascar is

where some of the world's most fragrant, best-quality vanilla beans come from.)


I tried ground vanilla against vanilla extract in *crème anglaise*, butter cookies, and rice pudding—in all cases, it delivered bigger, deeper flavor than extract (for every teaspoon of extract, substitute ¼ teaspoon ground vanilla).

Madagascar Ground Vanilla leaves coarser bits than the telltale pin-dots of a scraped vanilla pod. You'll notice this in

puddings and doughs; custards will need straining. For my money, scraping out the insides of a vanilla bean is still the best way to get full-tilt vanilla flavor, but Madagascar Ground Vanilla is a fragrant, flavorful, and convenient alternative to extract. A ½-ounce jar is about \$10; a 2-ounce jar is about \$22. To order, visit www.deananddeluca.com or www.tavolo.com, or call 800/735-3687.


—A.A.

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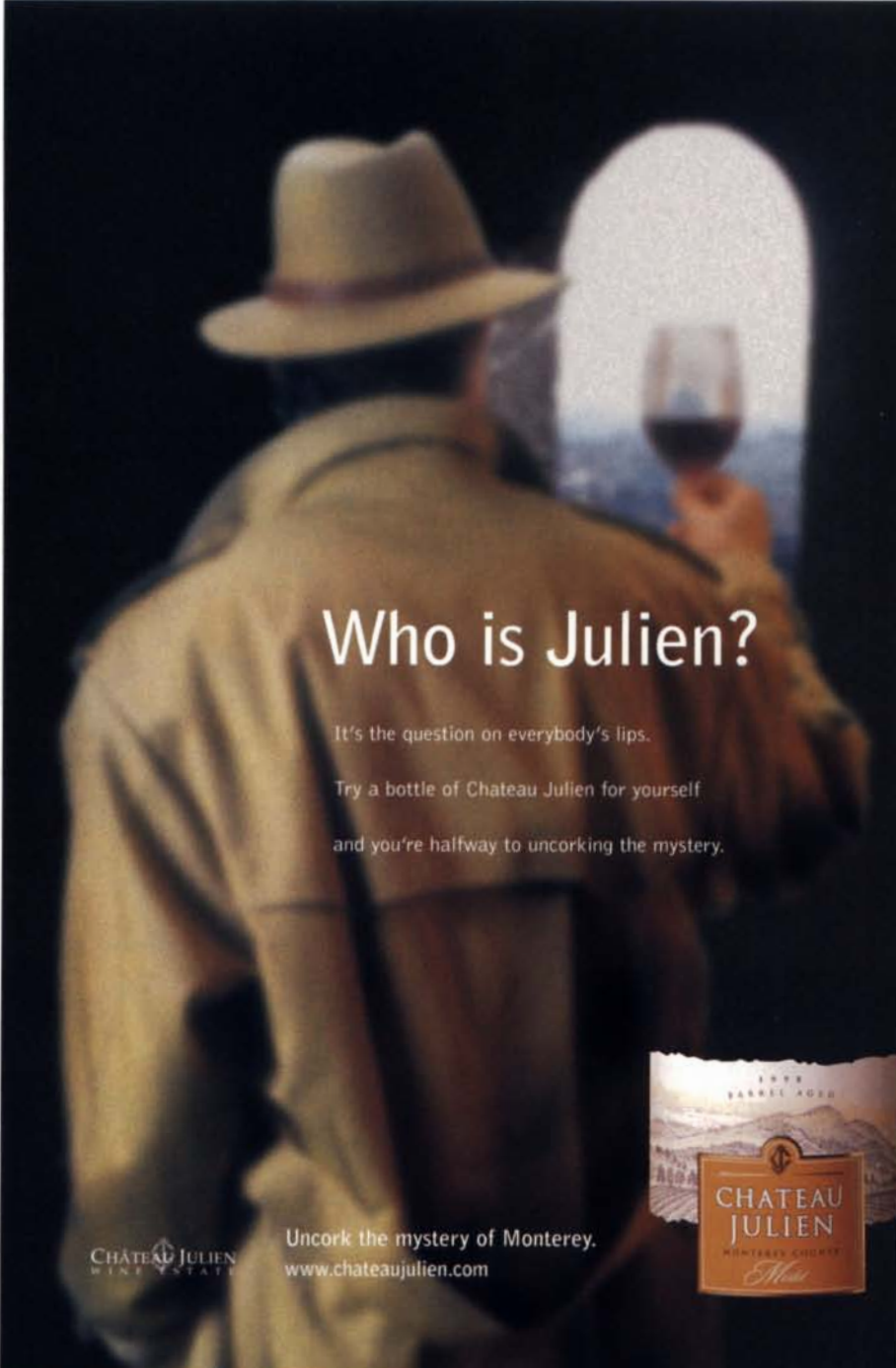
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Sweet, tangy cultured butter from Vermont Butter & Cheese Company

The Vermont Butter & Cheese Company, maker of award-winning chèvre and *crème fraîche*, has unveiled a superb new product, Vermont Cultured Butter. While most butter is churned from fresh (sometimes called sweet) cream, this butter is made from cultured cream (something very

close to *crème fraîche*), giving it the deeper, slightly tangy flavor found in the best European butters. It's also very lightly salted ($\frac{1}{3}\%$, compared to average salted butter's nearly 2%). This bit of salt doesn't leave an obvious salty taste; rather it underscores the butter's delicious natural taste.

In my tests, I substituted the cultured butter for my regular unsalted butter with great results. When spread on a piece of toast or melted over steamed vegetables, the cultured butter adds so much flavor and makes everything taste so much better that ordinary butter tastes bland and oily in comparison. Besides its great flavor, Vermont Cultured Butter boasts a super-high butterfat content—a whopping 86%, as compared with 80% to 82% for average butter. In cooking, this translates into thicker, more luxurious butter sauces and hollandaise and less water to evaporate when making clarified butter. For sautéing, there's less splatter and better browning. Its drier, more elastic texture also makes for flakier, lighter pastry doughs and pie crusts. The butter is available in 8-ounce rolls (about \$3.50) and 1-pound packages (about \$6) at specialty stores (Dean & DeLuca, Hay Day/Sutton Place) and groceries (including Whole Foods and Wegmans) nationwide. Or call 800/884-6287 or visit www.vtbutterandcheeseco.com.

— Molly Stevens, contributing editor

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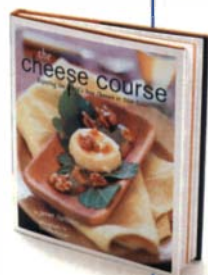
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Celebrating the cheese revolution

We cheese lovers are in luck. Not only do we have access to more and better European cheeses every day, but we're smack in the middle of an American cheese revolution. There are now over 200 American specialty cheesemakers; ten years ago, only a handful existed, according to Laura Werlin in *The New American Cheese* (Stewart, Taboori & Chang, \$35). Werlin's gorgeous, informative book offers profiles of 50 cheesemakers and 80 recipes for using their cheeses in every course. Cheese lovers will also want Janet Fletcher's charming new book, *The Cheese Course* (Chronicle, \$19.95), which shows us how to buy and serve cheese, with 40 recipes and lovely photos.

—Susie Middleton, managing editor



Getting to know manchego and other Spanish cheeses

What joy I get from seeing some of Spain's many artisanal cheeses—zamorano, garrotxa, cabrales, roncal, and a meltingly ripe torta del casar, to name a few—wedging their way into U.S. markets. I'm a fan of all these cheeses.

But in both availability and popularity, manchego is still the reigning king; its mild, faintly nutty flavor makes it an easy eating cheese, a solid anchor for any cheese plate, and a favorite in tapas bars throughout Spain. Made from sheep's milk and aged from sixty days to three years, manchego develops more flavor, a harder texture, and a yellower hue as it matures. I prefer aged manchego, although it costs a bit more (about \$13 per pound) than a younger "semi-cured"

variety (about \$10 per pound). Try adding tiny chunks of a longer-aged manchego to omelets or grate it into a pasta or baked vegetable dish. To serve as a tapa, follow tradition: slice wafer-thin triangles off a narrow wedge and fan them out on a plate.

Buy manchego from a store with high turnover or by mail-order: try Murray's Cheese (888/692-4339 or 212/243-3289) or www.igourmet.com.

—Sarah Jay, associate editor



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Do you have any cool tricks, improved techniques, or ingenious ideas that make your cooking more efficient, enjoyable, or delicious? Write to *Tips, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

Protect wooden-handled skillet with foil

I inherited a cast-iron skillet with a wooden handle and couldn't wait to use it for baking cornbread and chicken. To protect the wooden handle in the oven, I wrapped it with heavy-duty aluminum foil and had no problems (the foil and the handle got very hot, but the wood didn't crack).
—Rosalind Foyer, Encino, CA

Cool down stocks with ice-filled bags

Here's a fast, simple way to cool down a hot stock quickly so you can skim off the fat. I came to this method after using ice cubes, which work, but this method is even better.

First you'll need to fill a few heavy-duty zip-top bags with



Freeze water in zip-top bags and use the frozen bags to quickly cool stocks without diluting them.

water, seal them, and freeze them (be sure the bag is truly watertight; some of the new zipper bags leak). When you want to cool down a hot stock or sauce, let it rest off the heat for a minute or two and then drop one or more of these frozen bags into it. The ice melts, but it doesn't dilute the



To ovenproof a skillet with a wooden handle, wrap the handle in heavy-duty foil.

flavor. Refrigerate the stock, and in an hour you can usually start lifting off the congealed fat. If you're in a big hurry, just drag the frozen bag back and forth across the top of the liquid; a significant amount of fat will collect right on the bag.

—Randolph M. Siverson, El Macero, CA

A drying rack keeps pot lids organized

After trying various ways to store the lids of my pots and casseroles so they were accessible yet organized, I finally hit upon a method that works for me. I bought a dish-drying rack (the kind you would put on your counter next to the sink) and set my lids in it, arranged by size. The rack sits on a shelf next to my pots and pans. Now the right lid is at my fingertips.

—Stacey Ballis, Chicago, IL

Toss sponges into the dishwasher

The last items that go into my dishwasher before I turn it on are my kitchen sponges. They come out fresh and clean, and they last longer.

—Lisa Jung, San Rafael, CA

Roast garlic cloves individually

I'm a live-alone widow who loves to cook with roasted garlic. Rather than roast an entire head, I pick six to eight large cloves (skin on), coat

them with about ½ teaspoon olive oil, and set them on a piece of foil in my toaster oven. I bake them at 325°F for 10 to 13 minutes, turning them frequently.

—Barbara Hays Beckstrand, San Diego, CA

Rest roast chicken on a rack, not in its juices

After roasting a chicken, let it rest on a rack over a platter while you make your pan sauce. This way the chicken doesn't end up sitting in its own juices and softening its nice crisp skin.

—Daniel Fredette, Herndon, VA

Rinse cheesecloth before using

Before using a new piece of cheesecloth for any cooking task, it's a good idea to shake out any lint and dust. If I'm using the cloth to line a colander or sieve, I also rinse it with water, which makes the cloth stick to the strainer so it doesn't slide around as I begin pouring in hot stock.

—Chef Robert Danhi, instructor, Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, NY

Better whipped cream for frosting

When I want to use whipped cream as a frosting or filling between cake layers, I stabilize it with gelatin: For 1 cup of heavy cream, I use a solution of 1 teaspoon unflavored pow-

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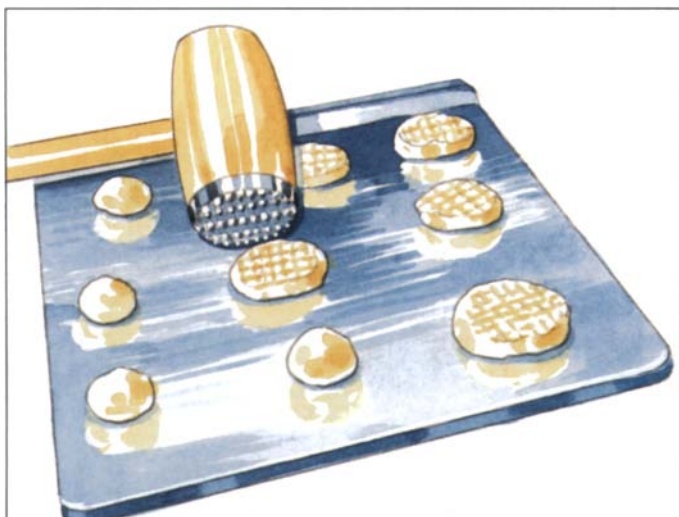
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A textured meat tenderizer dipped in sugar gives cookie dough balls a crunchy topping while flattening them at the same time.

dered gelatin softened in about 2 tablespoons cold water (microwave the mixture for a few seconds to dissolve and then cool). Add this in a steady stream while whipping the sweetened whipped

cream. The stabilized whipped cream is especially useful when decorating a cake with a basketweave design or when piping out rosettes.

—Linda Wellford,
Davis, CA

Pressing a sugar topping on cookies

I use a hammer-type meat tenderizer to flatten peanut butter cookie dough and also to give it a nice sugary topping. I dip the waffle surface of the tenderizer into a dish of sugar, set it on top of a cookie-size ball of dough, press to flatten it, and then bake.

—Jean Henderson,
Colville, WA

Lemon helps dissolve calcium deposits

If you live in an area with high calcium content in the water, as I do, unsightly calcium deposits can build up around the sink faucets and other places. The mild acid in lemon juice seems to dissolve the calcium, so every time I juice a lemon or other citrus fruit, I rub the squeezed half

over these areas. This saves future scrubbing with abrasive cleaners or chemicals, and the “fresh lemony scent” is genuine.

—Angie Newton,
Twickenham, England

Keeping inventory of freezer food

I’ve used one of your reader’s tips about using stackable crates in the chest freezer and then storing foods by category. To help keep track of what’s in there, I keep a running list of what goes in and what comes out. When I put food into the freezer, I add it to the list, noting the quantity, the date it went in, and the date it would expire, and when I take something out, it gets crossed off. I keep the inventory list on my fridge, along with a food storage



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profile

Paul Kahan

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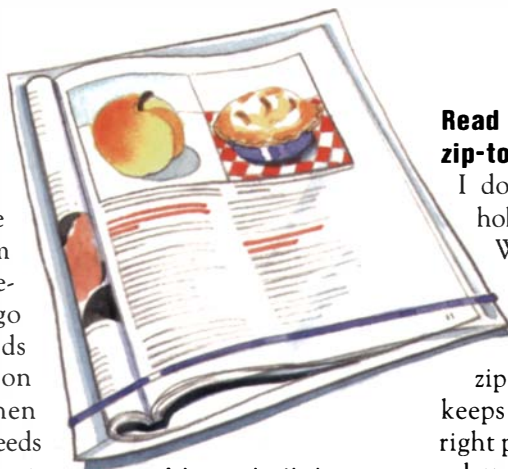
*National Sanitation Foundation - Ann Arbor, MI



TIPS

chart. This way, nothing gets lost or forgotten in the freezer, and when I don't know what to make for supper or when I'm rushed, I check the list, decide what I want, and go fetch it. This list reminds me when I'm running low on certain foods, and when there is something that needs to be eaten or else tossed out.

—Carole Villeneuve,
Chelsea, Quebec



A large plastic bag protects books and magazines while keeping the right page.

Have roux on hand for sauces

About once a month, I make a large batch of full-flavored roux, spending the time to cook it slowly to its nutty, buttery best. I keep the roux refrigerated, letting it soften at room temperature before using it for sauces or soups. Recently while making a sauce, I

forgot to take the roux from the fridge. It was way too firm to spoon out, so I grabbed my citrus zester and scraped it along the surface of the hardened mixture. Wonderful strands of roux came through like a charm, letting me use as much or as little as needed.

—Claudia Imatt,
Pleasanton, CA

Read recipes through a zip-top bag

I don't own a cookbook holder, nor do I need one. When I open a cookbook or magazine to the page with the recipe I'm using, I slip it into a large zip-top plastic bag. This keeps the book open to the right page, and saves it from splatters and spills.

—Billie L. Porter,
Newburyport, MA

Removing a stubborn Champagne cork

A stubborn cork on a bottle of bubbly isn't just frustrating, it can also be dangerous. Here's a tip for pulling sparkling wine corks safely when a dishtowel or napkin won't work. Slip a garlic peeler (the four-inch rubber tube variety) over the cork and bottleneck and twist.

The rubber gives you traction and prevents the cork from flying out of the bottle.

—Kimberly Charles,
San Francisco, CA

Stock up on fresh corn

When fresh corn shows up on farmstands, I buy a couple of cases at once. Some gets eaten right away, but the rest gets frozen for future use in soups, breads, and side dishes. I shuck the corn, parboil it along with some of the husks for about 90 seconds, drain it, and then cut the kernels off the cob. I line the bottom of a freezer container with husks, add a layer of corn, and alternate until the container is full. The husks divide the kernels into portions, so it's easy to defrost just the amount I need.

—Kathleen M. Larkin,
Houston, TX ♦

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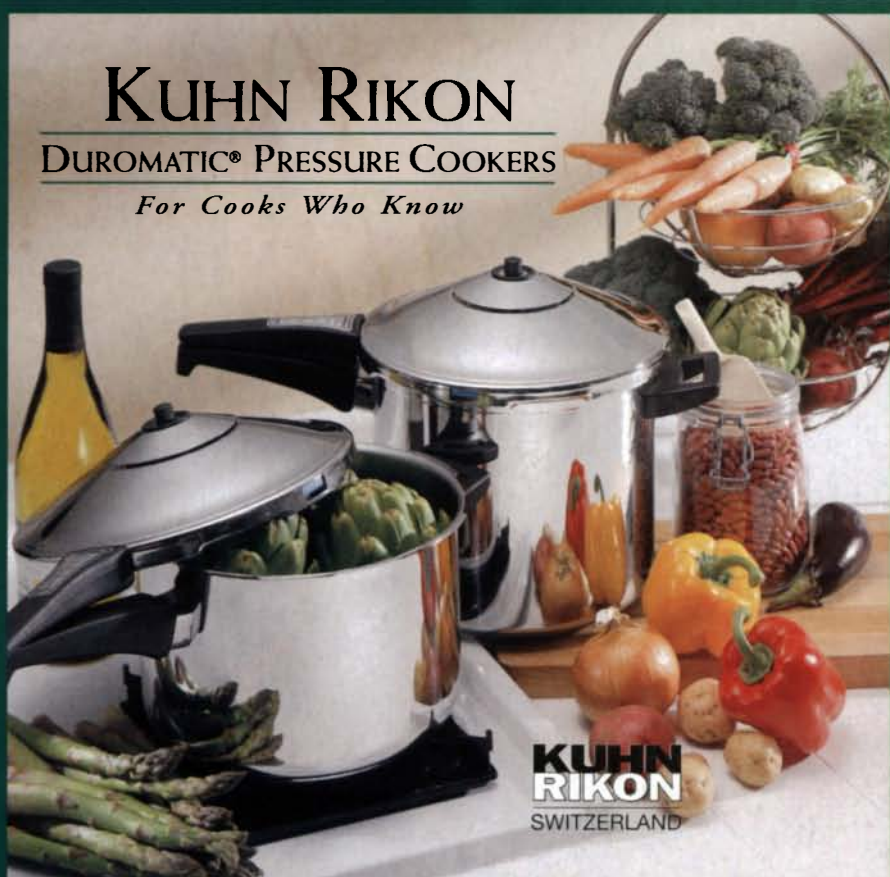
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Riesling is a Thanksgiving crowd-pleaser



Chances are you'll have a group at your Thanksgiving table whose tastes and wine savvy span a wide range. But choosing wine for such a diverse gathering needn't be a brain-twister. There's an affordable, easy-drinking wine that can handle everything from salty appetizers to sweet potatoes to a maple glaze on the turkey. That wine is Riesling, a dazzlingly food-friendly drink that appeals to a big variety of tastes (and that wine lovers take very seriously).

Rieslings that run from bone dry to sweet come from Germany, France, and many parts of the United States, to name a few places. To me, Thanksgiving seems prime time for this fabulous wine, but just to be sure, I checked in with some of my favorite wine people and asked which Riesling they might pick for their Thanksgiving dinner.

"Every holiday is prime time for Riesling," agrees Randall Graham, the winemaker at Bonny Doon Vineyards in California. "What's not to love? It's fruity, flavorful, not too alcoholic; it makes the food taste better and refreshes your mouth for the next gobble of turkey." Randall's favorites include dry Alsace Rieslings from Albrecht, Ostertag, and Weinbach, all around \$20.

Tim Gaiser, a frequent contributor to *Fine Cooking*, says, "With Riesling, there's a wider range of style than I've found in any other grape. Thanksgiving dinner can be so heavy—you need something moderate to light in alcohol, with high acidity to balance all that richness, plus a touch of sweetness to go with the sweet potatoes and cranberry relish,"

he explains. For Thanksgiving, Tim would choose fruity, flavorful German Rieslings with a dry to slightly sweet finish, such as Rheinhold Haart Piesporter Kabinett (\$18) and a "rich, weighty" Emrich-Schönleber Monzinger Frühlingsplätzchen Spätlese Trocken ("a mouthful, but a great wine"), \$30. He also raves about Ziliken Ockfener Bockstein Spätlese (\$22), which is off-dry and spicy.

Shirley Sarvis, a wine and food writer, insists that because of the mix of sweet and savory at the table, wine for Thanksgiving "must have a power of flavor that's tilted toward fruit, not oak." She likes Riesling from Smith-Madrone (Napa, \$14) or Trimbach (Alsace, \$18). I'd add Hugel Riesling, also from Alsace (\$17).

Nick de Sève, wine director for the Smith & Wollensky Restaurant Group in New York, likes Navarro Riesling (Mendocino, \$13), which is off-dry with apple-apricot flavors. "It's lean and crisp, good as an aperitif, and marries well with turkey, cranberries, and sweet potatoes," he says.

"Rieslings from the Finger Lakes region of New York State—most hovering in the \$10 range—can be sublime," says Steven Kolpan, a wine instructor at the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park. Steven likes semi-dry bottlings by Konstantin Frank, especially the light-bodied "Salmon Run," a steal at \$6. He also recommends Rieslings by Hermann Wiemer and Glenora. I'd add Fox Run, a deliciously dry Finger Lakes Riesling, nicely priced at \$10.

Amy Albert is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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Pulling Together a

A few of our favorite contributors offer a menu of crowd-pleasing recipes — a “pot luck” from the pros

In past years, *Fine Cooking* has offered its readers a complete Thanksgiving menu created by a single chef—a big undertaking that, truth be told, doesn’t really mirror the way the meal often comes together in our own homes. If your family works as ours do, the host deals with the turkey, stuffing, and gravy, while much of the rest of the traditional fare comes through the door with the guests. Your aunt might offer to make her famous cranberry sauce, your cousin wants to bring creamed onions, and the mood just wouldn’t be right without your uncle’s homemade pickles.

With that communal spirit in mind, our menu this year takes a new tack. We tapped a few of our frequent contributors for their favorite recipes, those special dishes that would cause a family uprising if they were absent from their Thanksgiving tables, and we wove them into a meal that truly is a shared endeavor. Beth Dooley, Lucia Watson, and John Martin Taylor gave us their regional takes on turkey and vegetable sides. Molly Stevens and Carole Walter chimed in with delicious, clever ways to handle appetizers and dessert. You’ll find all of their recipes on the pages that follow, along with some of the tricks they use to bring the meal together (and clean it up) as effortlessly and gracefully as possible.



Molly Stevens

Lemon-Pepper Cheese Coins

Shrimp with Cocktail Sauce & Cilantro Pesto

Marinated Olives

Photos except where noted: Scott Phillips



Stellar Thanksgiving

Beth Dooley and
Lucia Watson

Turkey with Maple-
Bacon Glaze

Wild Rice & Cornbread
Stuffing

Bourbon Gravy



John Martin Taylor

Sweet Potatoes
with Horseradish

Olive-Oil Braised
Collards

Photo at top right: ©Southern Living. Reprinted with permission.



Carole Walter

Gingery Cranberry-
Pear Tartlets

Pecan Tartlets

Pumpkin Tartlets



Marinated olives, cheese coins, and shrimp cocktail for nibbling

These simple, do-ahead "nibblers" are a great way to kick off Thanksgiving dinner.

You can marinate the olives and make the shrimp cocktail dips a couple of days in advance. The cheese coin dough can be made ahead, stamped out, frozen, and then baked the day of serving.

A few tips for the big day: We fire up an old refrigerator in the cellar, stocking it with cold drinks, washed lettuce, and make-ahead side dishes. A cooler on the porch will work, too. Early in the day, I set out the serving dishes



In the heat of the oven, these stamped-out crackers puff into light, flaky cheese coins.

(empty) and utensils on the buffet so I can see that everything fits.

Managing the aftermath can be tricky, too. Since the turkey carcass takes up so much room, I pick off the meat and seal it in a container. If

it isn't too late, I'll throw the carcass right into a stockpot and start the turkey soup that evening.

—Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, lives in Vermont.



Olive oil infused with rosemary and orange zest makes these marinated olives aromatic and flavorful.

Heat the oven to 375°F. For a dough log, slice it into coins just under ¼ inch thick. For a disk, roll it out to just under ⅛ inch thick and stamp out 1½- or 2-inch rounds or other shapes with a cookie cutter. Arrange them on an ungreased baking sheet and bake until well browned around the edges and no longer doughy in the center, 15 to 18 min. for thinner coins, 20 to 22 min. for thicker ones. Use a spatula to carefully transfer the coins to a cooling rack.

Shrimp with Cocktail Sauce & Cilantro Pesto

To simplify matters, buy cooked shrimp the day before Thanksgiving, and serve the shrimp well chilled for the best texture. Both sauces can be made two days ahead and kept covered in the refrigerator. *Yields 1 cup of each sauce; serves twelve.*

3 lb. cooked large shrimp, peeled with tails on

FOR THE COCKTAIL SAUCE:

¾ cup tomato ketchup

¼ cup fresh lemon juice

2 to 3 Tbs. prepared horseradish, to taste

½ tsp. celery seeds

¼ tsp. ground allspice

A few dashes Tabasco, to taste

FOR THE CILANTRO PESTO:

2 cups loosely packed cilantro leaves and tender stems

⅓ cup unsalted roasted peanuts

1 clove garlic

1 fresh jalapeño, cored and seeded

3 scallions, trimmed and roughly chopped

1 Tbs. fish sauce

⅓ cup fresh lime juice

¼ cup peanut oil

To make the cocktail sauce—In a bowl, stir all the ingredients together. Add more horseradish or hot sauce to taste. Chill before serving.

To make the cilantro pesto—In a food processor, combine the cilantro, peanuts, garlic, jalapeño, and scallions. Process to a rough paste. Add the fish sauce and lime juice; process until the sauce begins to turn creamy. With the motor running, slowly pour in the oil; process until combined. Chill before serving.

RECIPES

Lemon-Pepper Cheese Coins

There are two ways to shape these savory crackers: slice thin coins from a log of dough, or stamp out shapes with a cookie cutter. The log gives a more crumbly, crisp cracker, while the stamping method gives a lighter, flakier pastry. The coins will keep in an airtight container for two days. *Yields 6 to 8 dozen.*

6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose flour

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

4 tsp. grated lemon zest

1 Tbs. coarsely cracked black pepper

1 tsp. coarse salt

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small pieces

⅓ cup sour cream, chilled

1 large egg yolk

1 to 2 tsp. fresh lemon juice, if needed

Combine the flour, cheese, lemon zest, pepper, and salt in a food processor. Process until combined. Add the butter and pulse until the dough resembles coarse crumbs. Add the sour cream and egg yolk and pulse again until just incorporated.

Test the dough by squeezing a bit between your fingertips—if it's too dry to hold together, sprinkle on a bit of lemon juice and pulse again. When the dough holds together, dump it onto a lightly floured surface and press into either a 12-inch log or a flat disk. Wrap in plastic and chill for 2 hours, or up to 2 days.

Marinated Olives

I like these best when made with a mix of two or three types of whole, unpitted olives, especially kalamata, niçoise, and picholine. *Yields 3 cups.*

3 cups mixed olives, rinsed and drained well
1 cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 sprigs fresh thyme
3 sprigs fresh rosemary
1½ tsp. whole fennel seeds
2 strips orange zest
¼ tsp. dried red pepper flakes
1 bay leaf
1 clove garlic, slivered
¼ cup fresh lemon juice

Put the olives in a 1-qt. jar. In a small saucepan, combine the oil, thyme, rosemary, fennel seeds, zest, pepper flakes, bay leaf, and garlic. Heat on very low for 10 min. Pour the oil and seasonings over the olives. Add the lemon juice and close the jar. Turn a few times to distribute the seasonings; let cool to room temperature. Store in the refrigerator for no longer than 4 days. Before serving, bring the olives to room temperature and drain off most of the oil.

Maple-Bacon Glazed Turkey with Wild Rice & Cornbread Stuffing & Bourbon Gravy

You can make the cornbread two days ahead and the complete stuffing one day ahead. Follow the package directions to cook the wild rice. *Yields 12 cups stuffing; serves ten to twelve.*

1 turkey, 12 to 13 lb., preferably fresh, defrosted if frozen
5 to 7 cups homemade or low-salt canned turkey or chicken stock; more if needed
½ cup dried cranberries
1 cup apple or pear cider
1 recipe Cornbread (see p. 46), broken into chunks
4 cups cooked wild rice (start with 1 cup raw)
4 ripe pears, peeled, cored, and diced
8 oz. (16 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
4 scallions, trimmed, white parts chopped

2 Tbs. chopped fresh sage
1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic
1 Tbs. salt; more to taste
2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper; more to taste
6 strips good-quality bacon
½ cup real maple syrup
3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
2 Tbs. bourbon, or to taste

Remove the neck and giblets from the turkey. Discard the liver (or use it for chopped liver), but simmer the turkey neck, heart, and gizzard in the stock for half an hour to give the stock a more meaty flavor; strain out the giblets before using the stock. Rinse the turkey inside and out and pat it dry. Plump the dried cranberries in the cider by warming them both in a saucepan or in the microwave and letting them stand

For a moist bird, roast with bacon strips and glaze with maple syrup

Far be it from us to mess with the Thanksgiving turkey—well, okay, we've done a tiny bit of tweaking, but it's all for the better. Before roasting, we lay a few bacon strips on the breast, which keeps the meat moist and adds an edge of smoke. Toward the end of roasting, we baste with maple syrup. The bird emerges from the oven a lovely lacquered brown, its rich pan juices ready to be bound into a bourbon-laced gravy.

Here's our advice for making this annual meal a little easier on the host. A day or two before, clean out the refrigerator and consider clearing all unnecessary appliances off the counters. We look to others to help us out with the food. For example, Beth's sister loves to cook but wants guidance on what to bring, so she gets assigned a dish, maybe even a specific recipe.

We also think about how to orchestrate

people who wander into our kitchens to help. To use these volunteers efficiently, be specific with instructions. Tell someone to "remove the turkey from the oven, let it rest on that platter, and then strain the pan juices." Maybe you need to explain how to degrease the juices, too. —Beth Dooley, a food writer, and Lucia Watson, a chef, wrote *Savoring the Seasons of the Northern Heartland (Knopf)*. They both live in Minneapolis.



A flour and fat roux thickens the gravy; deglazed pan drippings enrich it.



Don't fret over the lumps—they're pears, which add texture.



Gravy to write home about: reduced cider, cooked-down pears, and a nip of bourbon are the secrets.

Sweet potatoes and braised collards: southern sides that free up the oven

What makes Thanksgiving such a challenge is that most of the traditional foods—foremost among them that monstrous bird—demand oven space at the same time. The beauty of my Olive Oil Braised Collards and Sweet Potatoes with

Horseradish side dishes is that they leave your oven free. The sweet potatoes are great made several hours ahead and reheated in the microwave. The collard greens are done on the stovetop; you can even make them ahead, too. Be forewarned that it

takes a lot of collards (about six bunches) to serve twelve. You'll need a very big pot (I use the biggest enameled pot that Le Creuset makes). —*John Martin Taylor wrote The New Southern Cook (Bantam). He lives in Charleston, South Carolina.*

for about 5 min. Drain the cranberries, reserving them and the cider separately.

Heat the oven to 350°F.

In a large bowl, toss together the cornbread, cooked wild rice, half of the diced pears, the melted butter, parsley, scallions, sage, garlic, and the drained cranberries. Season with the salt and pepper. Stir in about 1 cup of stock plus half of the reserved cider.

Loosely stuff the front and back cavities. Put the remaining stuffing in a buttered casserole dish, cover with foil, and bake alongside the turkey for the last 45 min. of roasting, adding a little stock if it seems dry.

Put the turkey on a roasting rack in a heavy roasting pan, tuck the wings under the back of the turkey, and lay the bacon strips over the breast. Add 1 cup of stock and the remaining cider to the pan, as well as the remaining pears. Roast for about 3 hours, basting frequently and adding more stock if the pan gets dry. (If you use a large roasting pan, you'll definitely need to add stock during roasting.)

During the last hour of roasting, baste the turkey with drippings and brush it with the maple syrup. The turkey is done when the juices run clear when the meat is pricked with a fork and the internal temperature of the thigh is 175°F, about 3½ to 4 hours total.

Minnesota stuffing starts with southern cornbread but gets its Great Lakes flavor from wild rice.



Transfer the turkey to a platter; tent it with foil to keep warm. To make carving easier, remove the bacon first.

Pour the juices from the roasting pan into a heat-proof 1-qt. measuring cup, holding back the fruit. Let the juices sit for at least 10 min. so the fat rises. Spoon off 4 Tbs. of the fat into the roasting pan; discard the remaining fat. Add enough stock to the juices to make 4 cups. Sprinkle the bottom of the pan with the flour and set over low heat. Whisk together the flour and fat into a roux, scraping up the bits of dark drippings stuck to the pan. Cook over low heat for about 5 min., stirring constantly; don't worry if the fruit gets a bit smashed—just whisk it along with the roux. Gradually whisk in the pan juices and stock; cook until the mixture thickens, whisking occasionally, about 5 min. Add the bourbon and season with salt and pepper. Taste and add more bourbon if you like.

Cornbread for Stuffing

Yields 7 cups cornbread, enough for the stuffing recipe starting on p. 45.

4¾ oz. (1 cup) fine to medium cornmeal

4½ oz. (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour

2 Tbs. sugar

1 Tbs. baking powder

¼ tsp. salt

1 large egg, lightly beaten

⅓ cup (5½ Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted

1 cup buttermilk

Lightly grease an 8- or 9-inch square pan. Heat the oven to 350°F. Sift the dry ingredients into a medium bowl. Add the remaining ingredients and stir to just moisten the dry ingredients; don't overmix. Pour the batter into the pan. Bake until the edges are light brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 20 to 30 min. Cool at least 5 min. before crumbling.

Sweet Potatoes with Horseradish

This casserole can be baked ahead and reheated in the microwave at the last minute, thus freeing the overburdened Thanksgiving oven. *Serves twelve.*

5 medium (about 2¼ lb.) sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced into even ¼-inch disks

¼ cup prepared horseradish, well drained

2 cups heavy or whipping cream

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat the oven to 400°F.

In a mixing bowl, toss the potatoes with the horseradish and cream, making sure that they're coated evenly. Season with salt and pepper. Spread the potatoes in a 10x15-inch baking dish—the potatoes should be in a thin, even layer and should be mostly submerged in the cream. Bake uncovered until the cream has reduced and thickened and the potatoes are soft and tender when pierced with a knife, 30 to 40 min. If making ahead, let the potatoes cool and then refrigerate; bring them back to room temperature before reheating. To serve, reheat the potatoes on medium-low power in the microwave or in a warm oven just until warmed through (be careful not to use too high a heat or the cream could separate), 3 to 4 min. in the microwave, or about 10 min. in the oven.



A daunting pile of collards cooks down in no time. Just add a handful, let them wilt, and then add more.

Olive-Oil Braised Collards

You can cook these greens a day ahead and reheat them on the big day. I like to serve them with hot pepper vinegar. *Serves twelve.*

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
7 lb. collards (about 6 bunches), well washed of grit, stalks trimmed, and leaves cut into 1-inch strips
2 to 3 tsp. coarse salt

In a very large, heavy pot with a tight-fitting lid, heat ¼ cup of the oil over high heat until it's very hot, just to the point of smoking. Add a handful of collards, water droplets still clinging to them, to the pot (be careful, this will sputter). Stir vigorously with long tongs or a wooden spoon until the greens are wilted. Continue adding handfuls of wet collards, stirring until they wilt before adding more. Add the salt and the remaining ¼ cup oil and stir well. Reduce the heat to low, cover the pot, and let the greens braise for 15 min.

Taste the greens; if they're not tender enough for your taste, continue the cooking, covered and over low heat, until they're done to your liking. If you're making them ahead, let the collards cool and then refrigerate. Reheat them by bringing them to a boil, reducing the heat to low, and simmering about 5 min.

Sweet Tartlet Dough

This buttery crust is easy to handle, can be made ahead and frozen for up to one month, and is a cinch to mold with a wooden tart tamper (see Sources, p. 86). I use three standard medium-size muffin tins, each cup measuring 2¾ inches. If you don't have three, bake the tartlets in batches. If you can't find superfine sugar, make your own by processing granulated sugar in a food processor for a few seconds. *Yields 3 dozen 2-inch tartlets.*

10½ oz. (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour
½ cup superfine sugar
¼ tsp. salt
1 cup cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
1 large egg
1 large egg yolk
1 Tbs. cold water
¾ tsp. vanilla extract

Put the flour, sugar, and salt in a food processor. Pulse 3 to 4 times to blend. Distribute the butter in the bowl and pulse 7 to 8 times. Process until the



These fully baked tartlets can be frozen for up to one month. To serve, simply pop them in the oven until warm.

mixture resembles coarse meal, 8 to 10 seconds. In a small bowl, beat together the egg, egg yolk, water, and vanilla with a fork. Pour the egg mixture over the flour mixture and pulse 5 to 6 times. Process until the mixture just begins to form a mass, 8 to 10 seconds. Empty the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead 6 to 8 times until the dough is just smooth and malleable. Shape it into an evenly thick 6-inch square. Using a pastry scraper or the dull side of a long knife, score the dough at 1-inch intervals so you get 36 1-inch squares. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and chill for at least 20 min.

Lightly spray the muffin tins with vegetable oil (not necessary for nonstick tins). Using the score lines as a guide, cut the dough into 36 1-inch pieces. Roll each piece into a ball in your palms (lightly flour your hands, if necessary). Put 1 ball in the center of each muffin cup.

If you have a wooden tart tamper, flour it lightly. Press the wider end onto a ball of dough until the dough thins out and begins coming up the sides of the cup, and then twist the tamper slightly to release it. Use the tamper's narrower end to push the dough halfway up the sides and to smooth out the dough where the sides meet the bottom.

If you don't have a tart tamper, use a narrow, flat-bottomed glass or your fingers, lightly floured, to press the dough into the cups.

Tilt the muffin tin to see if the dough reaches the same level in all the cups; also check for any holes in the dough (this could cause the tartlet to stick to the pan). Rub your thumb around the rim of the dough in each cup for a clean, smooth edge. Slightly less than ½ inch of each cup should be exposed. Chill for at least 10 min. to firm the dough and then fill the cups with any or all of the following fillings.

Gingery Cranberry-Pear Tartlets

Crystallized ginger accents this filling with sweet pears and tart cranberries. *Yields 12 tartlets.*

1 cup fresh cranberries
½ cup sugar
½ cup orange juice
2 medium, slightly underripe pears (I like Anjou), about ¾ lb. total, peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch chunks
½ cup golden raisins
4 tsp. minced crystallized ginger
A few drops vanilla extract
12 muffin cups lined with Sweet Tartlet Dough (see the recipe at left) (Continued)

More tips for Thanksgiving

For advice on choosing a turkey to baking pies, visit our web site:
www.finecooking.com

Mini tartlets—a neat reply to the request for “just a sliver” of pie

This trio of tartlets rescues you from the messy endeavor of serving splinter-thin slices of pie to guests who are full yet still want dessert. Three of these dainty tarts make a serving, so everyone can try them all.

There's no rolling of dough or blind-baking here. Instead, the sweet pastry dough is pressed into muffin tins with your

fingers or, even easier, with a wooden tool called a tart tamper (see Sources, p. 86).

You can fill and bake the tartlets up to four weeks ahead and freeze them. To do this, put the baked and cooled tartlets on a shallow pan and freeze until firm; then layer them between waxed paper in an airtight container. Baked

tartlets will also hold for three days in the fridge (cover them with waxed paper and then foil—not plastic wrap). To refresh them, bake uncovered at 325°F until warm, 5 to 7 minutes if refrigerated; 12 to 15 minutes if frozen.

—Carole Walter is the author of *Great Pies & Tarts* (Clarkson Potter). She lives in New Jersey.



A lightly floured tartlet tamper is the ideal tool for pressing dough balls into muffin cups, but your fingers or a small glass will work, too.



Don't bother fluting the edges, but do smooth the rim by running your thumb along the dough's top edge.

In a 3-qt. saucepan, cook the cranberries, sugar, and orange juice over medium heat just until the berries begin to pop. Reduce the heat to a simmer, partially cover, and cook for 5 min. Add the pears, raisins, and ginger. Cook over low heat with the lid askew until the pears are translucent, stirring gently if necessary, 10 to 12 min. Uncover and continue cooking until the liquid is syrupy and has reduced to about 2 Tbs., about 2 min. Remove from the heat and gently stir in the vanilla (avoid crushing the pears). Let cool to room temperature; the mixture thickens as it stands.

Position an oven rack to the lower third of the oven. Heat the oven to 375°F. Spoon the filling into the dough-lined muffin cups. Bake until the pastry is golden brown and the fruit is bubbling, about 30 min. Cool for 10 min. Run a thin knife around the tartlets to loosen and then let them cool until they're firm enough to handle, about another 15 min. Using the tip of a small knife, gently lift the tartlets from the pan and set them on a wire rack to cool.

Pecan Tartlets

This version of pecan pie is neither cloyingly sweet nor overly gooey. It's simply crunchy toasted pecans sprinkled over a mouthwatering brown sugar filling. *Yields 12 tartlets.*

2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 Tbs. heavy cream
¼ cup packed light brown sugar
1 tsp. all-purpose flour
Pinch salt
½ cup light corn syrup
1 Tbs. melted unsalted butter
¾ tsp. vanilla extract
12 muffin cups lined with Sweet Tartlet Dough
(see the recipe on p. 47)
4 oz. (1 cup) broken pecans, lightly toasted in a 325°F oven for 8 to 10 min.

Position an oven rack to the lower third of the oven. Heat the oven to 375°F.

In a medium bowl, blend the eggs and cream. In another bowl, combine the brown sugar, flour, and salt. Stir the dry ingredients into the egg mixture, along with the corn syrup and melted butter; don't overmix. Stir in the vanilla extract. Transfer the filling to a measuring cup with a spout and pour into the dough-lined muffin cups. Sprinkle the pecans evenly over the tops. Bake until the pastry is golden brown, 28 to 30 min. Cool for 10 min. Run a thin knife around the tartlets to loosen and then let them cool until they're firm enough to handle, about another 15 min. Using the tip of a small knife, gently lift the tartlets from the pan and set them on a wire rack to cool.

Pumpkin Tartlets

You might want to garnish these with whipped cream and perhaps a very thin strip of orange zest, twisted into a knot. *Yields 12 tartlets.*

1 large egg yolk
¾ cup canned pumpkin purée
½ cup heavy cream
¼ cup packed light brown sugar
½ tsp. grated orange zest
½ tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. ground nutmeg
⅛ tsp. salt
A few dashes ground cloves
12 muffin cups lined with Sweet Tartlet Dough
(see the recipe on p. 47)

Position an oven rack to the lower third of the oven. Heat the oven to 375°F.

Put all the ingredients in a food processor. Pulse just until the mixture is smooth, 5 to 6 times; don't overprocess. Empty the filling into a measuring cup with a spout and pour the filling into the dough-lined muffin cups. Bake until the pastry is golden brown, 30 to 35 min. Cool for 10 min. Run a thin knife around the tartlets to loosen and then let them cool until they're firm enough to handle, about another 15 min. Using the tip of a small knife, gently lift the tartlets from the pan and set them on a wire rack to cool. ♦



Deliciously Tender Vegetable Compotes

Gently simmer vegetables for a melty-smooth side dish that's almost like a savory jam

BY ISABELLE ALEXANDRE

Humble ingredients, divine results. Winter faithfuls like cabbage and apples turn silky in these compotes.

Autumn is in the air. The farmers' market will be closing soon, garden tomatoes are on the wane, and the last of the summer squash from my neighbor's garden is just about gone.

In other words, it will be months before tender, new spring vegetables start showing up. I don't mean to sound gloomy, but winter can be a challenge for any vegetable lover, and it always has me racking my brain for easy, delicious ways to cook mine. So, instead of a cooking method that emphasizes immediacy and freshness, I use one that's all about concentrated flavor and silky texture: I make vegetable compotes.

A traditional fruit technique that's great for vegetables, too

You're probably used to thinking of a compote as a fruit dish, often stewed. That's traditionally how the term compote is used, and it's how I got my inspiration for these tender, jammy side dishes. The French verb *compôter* means to cook gently—to stew, really—until ingredients start to collapse and become





Eggplant & Zucchini Compote is an abbreviated ratatouille—minus the tomatoes and peppers.

almost purée-like. The process is simple: thinly slice the vegetables, start the cooking with olive oil (or another fat, like bacon drippings), add stock and other seasonings, and simmer over medium heat, usually covered, until the vegetables are tender.

Gentle cooking lets flavors meld and mellow

I find that people who say they don't like vegetables (like my dad) love these compotes. He says it's because the gentle cooking softens flavors and lets them meld into something different than, say, steamed vegetables.

A compote is different from a braise. Even though I'm cooking the vegetables slowly and gently in just a bit of stock—which sounds like a braise, I admit—it's the finished result that qualifies these side dishes as compotes: vegetables gently cooked until they're

fall-apart tender, almost jam-like, and a pan that's just about dry.

For tender results, slice the vegetables thinly. Slices of cabbage, onions, and fennel won't be more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick; you'll slice the eggplant a little thicker. If the slices are too thick and chunky, the vegetables won't attain the right degree of tenderness; if the slices are too thin, they'll break down too quickly, resulting in mush.

Go for a minimum of browning. While sautés, sears, and braises get their flavor from an initial browning, in this case, these compotes come out best if the vegetables are browned as little as possible. This way, they turn melty-tender, and their mellow flavor will shine through. Stock adds subtle flavor, and you'll notice that the cabbage-apple compote gets a flavor boost from bacon—a nod to the cooking of Toulouse, my hometown, whose food and wines are some of my favorites.

RECIPES

Eggplant & Zucchini Compote

If you can't find Chinese eggplant, use Italian, and be sure to choose one that hasn't been languishing on the shelf. Serves four to six.

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 medium onion, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick**
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb. Chinese or Japanese eggplant, unpeeled, sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick**
- 4 small zucchini (about $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb. total), sliced $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick**
- 1 tsp. coarse salt, or to taste**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable stock**
- 6 or 7 large cloves garlic, finely chopped (to yield $\frac{1}{4}$ cup)**
- 1 sprig each of thyme and rosemary, and 1 bay leaf, tied in a bouquet**

In a large, straight-sided sauté pan over low heat, heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the olive oil. Add the onion and eggplant, raise the heat to medium, and cook, stirring to distribute the oil, until the eggplant has soaked up the oil and is starting to change color, about 5 min. Add the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil along with the zucchini and cook, stirring occasionally, until the zucchini starts to change color, about 10 min. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Add the stock, garlic, and herb

bouquet. Simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally and scraping up any browned bits until almost no more liquid remains, about 10 min.; if needed, turn up the heat to reduce the liquid. Take the pan off the heat, remove the herb bouquet, and adjust the seasonings. Let the compote rest in the pan for 15 min. or so before serving.

Cabbage-Apple Compote

Serve this alongside pork chops or roast turkey, with a glass of Gewürztraminer or a dry Sancerre. Serves four.

- 4 slices smoked bacon (I like applewood smoked)**
- 1 onion, thinly sliced**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ head (about $1\frac{1}{4}$ lb.) Savoy cabbage, thinly sliced (include some greenish leaves), large ribs removed**
- 1 cup homemade or low-salt canned vegetable or chicken stock; more as needed**
- 1 tsp. coarse salt, or to taste**
- 2 Granny Smith or Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored, and diced**
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste**

Heat a large, straight-sided sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the bacon slices and sauté, turning, until crisped. Drain on paper towels; when cool enough to handle, crumble and set aside. Drain all but 2 Tbs. of the fat from the skillet. Add the onion, reduce the heat to low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until just translucent, 5 to 6 min. There should be as little browning as possible, though the onions will look brown from the bacon fat. Add the cabbage, stock, and salt. Simmer, covered, until the cabbage is tender, about 30 min., stirring and checking occasionally to make sure there's enough liquid in the pan, adding a bit more if needed. Stir in the diced apples; simmer, covered, until the apples are well softened and the cabbage is



Stained but not browned—these onions get color and flavor from crisped bacon.



Fennel & Onion Compote gets an extra kick from star anise.



When the vegetables are tender and the pan is just about dry, a flavorful compote is ready to serve.

meltingly tender, about 10 min. Raise the heat to medium high to boil off any remaining liquid—the compote should be moist but there should be no excess liquid in the pan. Stir in the crumbled bacon, adjust the seasonings, and serve.

Fennel & Onion Compote

This compote is an especially good side dish for salmon, halibut, or monkfish.

Serves four.

- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 medium onion, sliced 1/8 inch thick**
- 2 medium bulbs fennel, trimmed and sliced 1/8 inch thick**
- 1/2 cup homemade or low-salt canned chicken or vegetable stock; more as needed**
- 1/2 tsp. dried thyme**
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice**
- 1/2 tsp. coarse salt, or to taste**
- 1 whole piece star anise**
- 2 Tbs. sugar**

In a large, straight-sided sauté pan, heat 1/4 cup of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onions, reduce the heat to low, and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 5 min.; the onions should not brown. Add the fennel, stock, the remaining 1/4 cup olive oil, thyme, lemon juice, salt, star anise, and sugar. Simmer, covered, stirring and checking the pan from time to time to make sure there's enough liquid, until the fennel is very tender, about 35 min. The compote should be moist but the pan should be dry; if needed, raise the heat to reduce any excess liquid. Discard the star anise, adjust the seasonings, and serve.

Isabelle Alexandre is the executive sous-chef at Hôtel Le Meridien in Lisbon, Portugal. ♦



Nothing beats a hearty meat sauce on a crisp, cold night. Pancetta and fennel contribute to the full flavor of this pork ragù.

Hearty Meat Sauces for Great Fall Dinners

Browning, deglazing, reducing the liquid, and simmering are the four steps to the sumptuous sauce called ragù

BY SUZETTE GRESHAM-TOGNETTI

Photos: Martha Holmberg

A recent trip to Italy reaffirmed my belief in one of that country's greatest creations: ragù. It seems like every Italian grandmother, including my husband's, has her own secret recipe for making this tender meat sauce.

To make a ragù, common cuts of meat and hearty vegetables are slowly cooked with wine and herbs to yield a complexity of flavors—individually distinguishable, yet enhanced by their marriage. You taste it and wonder, “How did they do that?”

The mystery is revealed once you understand the techniques used to make the sauce. The process includes browning the meat and vegetables and reducing the added liquids to intensify flavors.

For great texture, grind the meat yourself, or sear the already ground stuff in chunks

Ragù originated with the peasants of Italy as a way to use up every scrap of meat. Today we still use inexpensive cuts of meat because they offer the most flavor and they benefit from long cooking. For my ragùs, I often use beef chuck and pork shoulder, both of which can be mixed with other meats, including veal, rabbit, or a bit of sausage, pancetta, or prosciutto. For beef ragùs, I like chuck or skirt steak; for pork, the butt or shoulder. Country-style “ribs,” which are actually cut from the shoulder, are also great for ragù.

I prefer to grind my own meat for freshness and because I prefer a coarser grind than what I usually find ground in the grocery store. But when testing the recipes for this article, I discovered that some home grinders can yield a texture that becomes mealy with the long cooking. Here are two solutions:

Pulse chunks of meat in the food processor. For a sauce with a chunkier, more rustic feel, try this

trick: Cut the meat into 1- to 1½-inch chunks that include some of the fat for flavor and texture. Pulse these chunks in the food processor in two or three batches until the meat looks lightly ground.

Buy ground meat but don't crumble it. Many recipes for meat sauce suggest crumbling the ground meat as you add it to the hot oil for browning. The texture of my ragùs will turn out best if instead you break the ground meat into pieces of about 1 inch and sear those until browned on both sides. These chunks seem to take better to the long cooking and will break down more slowly into smaller pieces while the ragù cooks.

For the best flavor, sear, deglaze, reduce, and simmer

The pot needs to be very hot to sear the meat; I put mine over high heat for a few minutes and then turn the heat down to medium high to cook the meat. Only add as much meat as will fit in a single layer. This may mean cooking the meat in batches until you're ready to add the liquid ingredients, but the extra effort is worthwhile. If you crowd the pot, the meat will steam rather than sear, and it won't brown well.

Deglaze the pan—with wine, water, or stock—and scrape up all the flavored bits that may have stuck to the bottom of the pan. These browned bits add flavor and color to your ragù.

I almost always deglaze with wine: its acidity balances the richness of the meat. Always use a wine you would drink, though it needn't be a premium wine. I often use inexpensive Chianti in my beef ragùs.

I don't pour off any fat before deglazing (as some people do) because I find



Grind your own meat by pulsing chunks in the food processor for a more rustic sauce.



Packaged ground meat is fine, too, but sear it in pieces, not crumbled, for a tender but not mealy texture.



A single layer of meat browns best, whichever meat you use. Let one side get good and brown before stirring.



A good—but not expensive—wine deglazes the pan. Be sure to scrape up the browned bits and then cook the wine until it's reduced by at least half.



Gradually add and reduce beef stock to intensify the ragù's flavors. About two cups of stock goes into the sauce over two hours.



Toss the sauce with the pasta over heat to help the sauce cling.

that the fat adds flavor and makes the finished ragù more unctuous.

Reduce the liquid to build layers of flavor. You must allow the deglazing liquid to reduce by at least half before adding the next ingredient. Rushing this step can result in a lack of intensity.

Simmer to blend flavors gently and tenderize the meat. The effort is minimal; all you need to do is stir occasionally, and add a little stock or water if the ragù looks too dry or is in danger of scorching. Sometimes milk or cream is added to a ragù to round out its flavor while it simmers, as in that most famous of ragùs, ragù Bolognese. I usually add a bit of butter to my ragùs just before serving, which has the same effect.

Pairing pasta with ragù

The pasta to serve with ragù is one that will pick up and hold the sauce. I love penne rigate (which means ridged quills), as well as farfalle and fusilli. The sauce clings to these textured pastas, which are also hearty enough to stand up to the coarse sauce. More unusual noodles that also work well include pappardelle (wide ridged ribbons) and the triangular maltagliati. I also like to serve ragù with gnocchi or over roasted potatoes or polenta.

At the restaurant, I serve plates of pasta and ragù on a per-order basis. To do this, I toss some cooked pasta with some of the ragù in a small heated frying pan. The heat helps bind the sauce to the pasta better than simply tossing everything in a serving bowl.

You'll likely be preparing more than one portion at a time, but you can do the same kind of thing by returning the drained pasta to the pot in which you cooked it. Add enough ragù to balance the pasta and add ½ tablespoon unsalted butter per serving. Mix together over medium heat until the butter melts.

Ragù has great holding power, and time actually improves its flavor. The sauce can keep for a week,

covered in the refrigerator, and it can also be frozen. If you do freeze the ragù, let it defrost overnight in the fridge and then slowly bring it to a simmer, adding a little broth or water to prevent scorching.

RECIPES

Calabrese Pork Ragù with Fennel

Pancetta, cured Italian bacon, is becoming available at many supermarkets; you'll also find it at specialty stores and in Italian markets. *Yields 8 cups of sauce, enough for about 1 lb. pasta; serves eight.*

3 lb. pork butt or shoulder (from about a 7 lb. bone-in shoulder) or 3 lb. packaged ground pork

1 large yellow onion, chopped

2 Tbs. olive oil

6 oz. pancetta, finely chopped

1 Tbs. finely chopped garlic

1 Tbs. whole fennel seeds, crushed

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 tsp. sugar

1 tsp. dried oregano

1 bay leaf

1 tsp. dried red pepper flakes

1 cup dry white wine

2 cups canned puréed tomatoes

¾ cup tomato paste

1½ to 2 cups water

Unsalted butter, ½ Tbs. per serving; more to taste

1 lb. pasta, cooked *al dente*

Freshly grated Parmesan (optional)

If using pork shoulder or butt, cut off any skin and discard, and then cut the meat off the bone into chunks about 1 inch or so. In a food processor, pulse the pork in batches, about five times for a few seconds each time; set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a large heavy-based pot over medium heat. Add the pancetta and onions and sauté, stirring occasionally, until browned, 12 to 15 min. Add the garlic and crushed fennel and stir for about 2 min. Transfer to a large bowl.

Increase the heat to medium high. In the same pot, add just enough of the ground pork to make one layer. If using packaged ground meat, don't crumble it; instead, break it into pieces (about 1 inch) to brown. Season with salt and pepper. Brown the meat all over, stirring occasionally, 3 to 5 min. Transfer the first batch of meat to the bowl and sear the remaining pork in batches, if necessary; add more olive oil as needed.

Return all the seared pork and the onion mixture to the pot. Add the sugar, oregano, bay leaf, red pepper, 2 tsp. salt, and 1½ tsp. pepper, and stir to combine. Pour in the wine to deglaze the pot, stirring up any browned bits stuck to the bottom of the pan. Let the wine reduce by at least half. Add the tomato purée and tomato paste and bring the sauce to a boil (the mixture will be thick).

Add ½ cup of the water, reduce the heat, and simmer the sauce, stirring occasionally, for 1½ to 2 hours. As it cooks, juices will evaporate; add the remaining water periodically, letting it reduce after each addition, to total 1½ to 2 cups. After 1½ hours, the meat should be tender and the flavors melded. Remove and discard the bay leaf. Immediately before serving, whisk ½ Tbs. butter per serving into the sauce and toss with the pasta. Serve sprinkled with Parmesan, if you like.

Beef Ragù Chiantigiana

This recipe is easily halved (as is the pork recipe), but even if you're cooking for fewer people, you might as well make a whole batch and freeze the leftover sauce. *Yields about 8 cups, enough for about 1 lb. of pasta; serves eight.*

4 lb. beef chuck or 4 lb. packaged ground chuck

2 to 3 Tbs. olive oil

1 tsp. salt

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

1 large carrot, finely chopped

2 ribs celery, finely chopped

1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

1 Tbs. minced garlic

2 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary

2 Tbs. chopped fresh sage

2 tsp. dried marjoram

2 cups Chianti or other light-bodied dry red wine

2 cups canned puréed tomatoes

2 cups homemade or low-salt canned beef stock

Unsalted butter, ½ Tbs. per serving; more to taste

1 lb. pasta, cooked *al dente*

Freshly grated Parmesan (optional)

If using beef chuck, cut it into 1-inch chunks, leaving on some of the fat. In a food processor, pulse the chunks in batches, about five times for a few seconds each time; set aside.

Heat the olive oil in a large, heavy-based pot. When the oil is hot, add just enough of the meat to

make one layer. If using packaged ground meat, don't crumble it; instead, break it into pieces (about 1 inch) to brown. Season with salt and pepper. Brown the meat all over, stirring occasionally, 3 to 5 min. Transfer the first batch of meat to a bowl and sear the remaining meat in batches, if necessary, add more olive oil as needed. In the same pot, sauté the carrot, celery, and onion until soft and lightly browned, about 10 min.

Return all the seared meat to the pot. Add the garlic, rosemary, sage, and marjoram and sauté briefly until fragrant. Add 1¾ cups of the wine and stir, scraping the bottom of the pot to loosen any browned bits. Let the wine reduce until it's almost gone, about 5 min. Reduce the heat to low. Add the tomato purée and simmer the ragù, uncovered, for 1½ to 2 hours. As it cooks, juices will evaporate; add ½ cup beef stock periodically (to total about 2 cups), letting it



reduce after each addition. After 1½ to 2 hours, the meat should be tender and the flavors melded. Add the remaining wine to taste toward the end of cooking to enhance the ragù's wine flavor, but allow some simmering time for the wine to cook off. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Immediately before serving, whisk ½ Tbs. butter per serving into the sauce; toss with the pasta. Serve sprinkled with Parmesan, if you like.

Ragù likes a noodle it can cling to, like these wide ridged ribbons served with the beef ragù.

Suzette Gresham-Tognetti is the chef-owner of Acquerello in San Francisco. ♦

Meaty Portabellas Make a Meal



Seared, roasted, grilled, or braised, these giant mushrooms have full flavor and a satisfying texture

BY GORDON HAMERSLEY

For years I had portobello mushrooms on my menu. Then I noticed the word portabella on the box of mushrooms from Phillips Mushrooms Farms in Avondale, Pennsylvania. Now I type the word differently every time. (Other variations include portobella and portabello.) Such capricious spelling drives my wife crazy, but no matter which version I use

on my menu, my customers love these giant, flavorful mushrooms. As for me, I find that they're not only great to eat, but fun to cook with as well.

The word portabella (that's how *Fine Cooking* has chosen to spell it) originated as a way to help glamorize and sell mature cremini mushrooms, which were themselves given a snazzy, Italian-sounding name to make them sound more appealing than the variation of the everyday cultivated white mushroom that they are. But if all of this sounds more like Marketing 101 than anything to do with cooking, know this: creminis have more flavor than white mushrooms, and portabellas have more flavor still.

The portabella was "discovered," probably by accident, when cremini caps were left to grow, open up, and develop gills. Creminis take about seven weeks to grow to the size at which they're picked. Those that are not picked then mature to become portabellas within three to five days, often growing to six inches across in size. During this growth spurt, the mushroom's gills become fully exposed, causing it to lose moisture. The loss of moisture concentrates

Photos except where noted: Judi Rutz

the mushroom's flavor and gives it the dense, meaty texture for which it's renowned.

Portabella's hearty, hardy nature takes well to roasting, braising, and grilling

Though you can eat portabellas raw, I prefer cooking them, which makes them tender and intensifies their flavor. My favorite ways to prepare them include searing, grilling, roasting, and braising.

Perhaps the best way to understand a portabella's greatness is to try one grilled. To start, remove the stem, wipe the cap, brush it with olive oil, and sprinkle both sides generously with coarse salt. Grill over a hot fire for a few minutes on each side. While you'd never mistake a mushroom for meat, the smoky, earthy flavor of a grilled portabella gratifies in the same way.

Portabellas also take well to roasting. While other mushrooms shrivel away to almost nothing when roasted, portabellas start out so big that they finish with a good amount of mushroom left, even when cut into pieces. I like to roast chunks of portabellas and sweet potatoes with whole garlic cloves and large pieces of onion. I start by tossing the vegetables with a little olive oil, a splash of balsamic vinegar, and an ample sprinkling of fresh chopped rosemary and coarse salt. I spread the vegetables on a rimmed baking sheet and roast at 450°F, shaking the pan a couple of times, for about 45 minutes.

Braising portabellas, as I do for the pasta recipe on p. 59, is a great way to boost their flavor. As the mushrooms cook, they absorb the braising liquid. Their sponge-like nature also makes them good candidates for marinades. The Asian marinade on p. 58 positively transforms the humble mushroom, giving it a spicy, vibrant flavor that you need to taste to believe.

Remove the stem with a snap, the gills with a spoon

I generally use all parts of portabellas. The stems, once trimmed and wiped cleaned, can be chopped up to use in a duxelles as you would use the stems of cultivated mushrooms. You can cut the stem out with a paring knife, but I find that grabbing it and twisting it off gives you a cleaner break.

Because the gills will turn anything I cook dark grayish brown, however, I often scrape them off—as shown in the photo on p. 58 for the creamy fettuccine recipe. I also sometimes scrape out the gills to make a little more room if I'm stuffing the mushrooms (see the sidebar on p. 59). But in the restaurant business, we never waste food, so I often add these flavorful scrapings to stocks or dark sauces.



Better than a burger. A roasted portabella topped with roasted garlic and cheese makes an irresistible sandwich.

Portabellas and sage give this creamy sauce a full and earthy flavor. Removing the gills from the mushrooms keeps the sauce from turning gray.



Author Gordon Hamersley gives the stem a good twist to pop it off. This method gives you a cleaner cut than a knife would.



Scrape out the gills to keep sauces light colored and to make room for toppings. Support the edges of the mushroom as you scrape to keep them from breaking off.

RECIPES

Asian Marinated Portabella "Steak"

I serve this full-flavored steak with jasmine rice and greens tossed with some of the marinade. Seared baby bok choy is also a nice accompaniment. *Serves two.*

- 1 tsp. olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1-inch piece fresh ginger, minced
- 1 tsp. five-spice powder
- ½ tsp. coriander seeds
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup rice wine
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 2 strips orange zest, 1 inch wide
- ¼ cup orange juice
- 2 Tbs. toasted sesame oil
- 4 medium portabellas, stems and gills removed, caps wiped clean with a moist paper towel
- ¼ cup vegetable oil

In a small pan, heat the olive oil until moderately hot. Add the garlic, ginger, five-spice powder, and coriander. Cook for 2 min., stirring to prevent burning. Add the water, rice wine, soy sauce, zest, and orange juice. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer for 5 min. Remove from the heat and add the sesame oil.

Arrange the portabellas in a shallow container in one layer and pour the hot mixture over them. Marinate for 1 to 2 hours, turning the mushrooms occasionally. Remove the portabellas and let them drain for a few minutes; reserve the marinade.

Heat the vegetable oil in a large sauté pan until hot. Sear the portabellas in one layer on one side, undisturbed, for about 5 min. Turn and sear the other side. Lower the heat if the portabellas are browning too fast. When tender, transfer them to paper towels

to absorb some of the grease. Slice each portabella very thinly on the diagonal as you would a flank steak (see the photo below); drizzle with some of the reserved marinade, if you like.

Roasted Portabella & Garlic Sandwich

In this recipe, the portabella is served whole, like a hamburger. If a whole cap doesn't fit on your bread, slice the cap on the diagonal, put the slices on the bread, top with cheese, and then broil. *Serves four.*

- 1 head garlic, loose papery skins removed
- 1 tsp. plus 1 Tbs. olive oil
- 4 medium portabellas, stems removed, caps wiped clean with a moist paper towel
- Coarse salt
- 2 medium shallots, finely chopped (to yield about ¼ cup)
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme
- 1 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 8 slices country-style bread, about ½-inch thick, or 4 really great quality rolls
- ¾ cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
- About 1 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley

Heat the oven to 450°F. Lay the garlic on a square of foil. Drizzle 1 tsp. of the olive oil over the top. Bring up the sides of the foil and wrap up the garlic. Roast until tender, about 40 min. Squeeze the garlic pulp into a small bowl and mash.

Rub the portabella caps all over with the 1 Tbs. olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Put them, gill side up, in an ovenproof pan. In a small bowl, combine the shallots, garlic, thyme, balsamic vinegar, and salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle the mixture evenly over the portabellas. Roast (you can do this at the same time as the garlic) until the mushrooms are tender and browned, 20 to 30 min. Remove the portabellas from the oven and set the oven temperature to broil.

Toast the bread slices on both sides under the broiler. Spread each slice with some roasted garlic purée; sprinkle with salt and pepper. Top four of the slices with a portabella; put them on a baking sheet.



Slice seared portabellas on the diagonal for a prettier presentation. The sliced "steak" (shown at right) strongly resembles meat.

Sprinkle the cheese over the portabellas and return them to the oven to melt the cheese. Top with the parsley and another bread slice to make a sandwich.

Sherry-Braised Portabellas with Sage & Linguine

Scrape out the gills with a teaspoon (see photo at left) to keep the sauce from turning gray. *Serves four.*

- 1 lb. portabellas (about 4 medium), stems and gills removed, caps wiped clean with a moist paper towel**
- 4 Tbs. olive oil**
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- 3 medium shallots, sliced**
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh sage**
- 1½ cups dry sherry**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- ½ lb. dried linguine**
- ¼ cup grated Asiago or *parmigiano reggiano***
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley; more for garnish**

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cut the portabella caps in half. Slice each half crosswise into ¼-inch slices.

Heat the olive oil and butter in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. When the butter is bubbling and nutty brown, add the portabellas and season with salt and pepper. Sauté until they begin to lose their juices and are well browned, about 5 min. Add the garlic, shallots, and sage and cook until fragrant, about 2 min. Add the sherry and simmer over medium heat until the portabellas are tender and the liquid has reduced by about half, about 8 min.

Meanwhile, cook the linguine *al dente*.

Add the heavy cream to the pan with the mushrooms and stir; reduce until the sauce coats the back of a spoon. Drain the pasta and add it to the pan of portabellas. Add the cheese and parsley and toss to coat. Top with additional parsley, if you like.

Gordon Hamersley and his wife, Fiona, own Hamersley's Bistro in Boston. ♦

Topping portabellas for "pizza"

A great way to serve portabellas is to stuff them. Truth be told, the cap of a portabella, though large, is not very deep. What you really end up with is something more akin to a portabella pizza. To start, stem the mushrooms (save the stems for another recipe) and wipe the caps clean with a moist paper towel. If you want to deepen the cavity a little, scrape out the gills with a teaspoon.

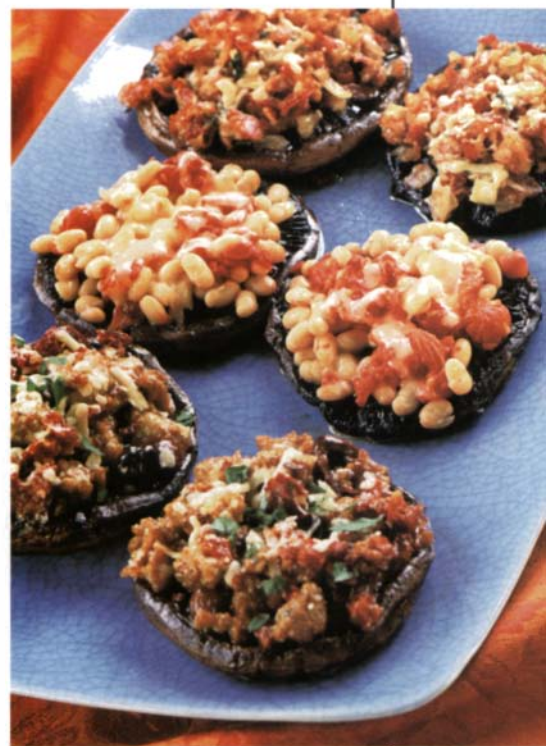
Prep the caps. Before topping portabellas with a filling, cook the caps by searing them in some olive oil for about 5 minutes on each side or by rubbing them with olive oil and grilling them.

Pancetta with Onions, Sage & Parmesan

Heat 1½ Tbs. olive oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add 4 oz. finely chopped pancetta (Italian bacon, available at most supermarkets) and fry until lightly golden. Add a chopped small onion and cook, stirring, until the onion is soft and lightly browned. Add 1 Tbs. chopped fresh sage and ¼ cup freshly grated Parmesan; season amply with freshly ground black pepper. Divide the filling between two prepared portabella caps. Sprinkle each with a little more cheese; broil briefly to melt the cheese.

White Beans with Rosemary, Tomatoes & Fontina

Heat 1½ Tbs. olive oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add a lightly crushed 4-inch sprig of rosemary and heat for a few minutes to release its aroma. Add a minced small garlic clove and cook until fragrant. Add 1½ cups cooked small white beans (or one 15-oz. can, drained), and cook another 5 minutes. Add ¾ cup seeded and diced tomatoes. Toss to combine the tomatoes with the beans, cook for a minute or so, and season with salt and pepper. Discard the rosemary and divide



the filling among four prepared portabella caps. Sprinkle each cap with some grated Fontina and broil briefly to melt the cheese.

Sausage with Olives, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Cream

Heat ½ Tbs. olive oil in a medium ovenproof skillet. Remove the casing from ½ lb. sweet sausage and crumble the sausage into the hot pan. Cook on medium high, breaking the sausage into smaller pieces as you stir, until cooked through, about 10 minutes. Drain off any excess fat. Add a pinch of red pepper flakes, 6 chopped sun-dried tomatoes, and 8 pitted, coarsely chopped kalamata olives. Cook 1 minute. Add 3 Tbs. heavy cream and cook, stirring, until the cream is almost all gone. Fill two prepared portabella caps and put them back in the skillet. Sprinkle with some grated Parmesan. Pour 1 to 2 tablespoons cream into the skillet and broil briefly to melt the cheese. Remove the portabellas and pour any liquid from the pan over them. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve.



The Classic Quiche is Back

I grew up with an Alsatian father, so our weekly menu always included a traditional Alsatian onion tart. Served for lunch or supper, often preceded by a soup and accompanied by either a salad or a bowl of homemade cornichons, this savory tart with a buttery crust and a sweet onion and Gruyère filling was one of my very favorite dishes.

So naturally, as soon as I got my own kitchen, I invested in a good rolling pin and some traditional porcelain tart pans and began to make quiches and savory tarts of my own. This was in the '60s, and with Julia Child on TV, quiche, crêpes, mousse, and just about everything French were all the rage with home cooks and restaurant chefs alike. But the thrill of discovery also brought the inevitable bad versions: crêpes filled with anything-goes combinations and soggy quiches with tasteless, rubbery custards. Before long, these French classics lost out to designer pizza and all things Italian.

But I never stopped loving quiche, and I'm glad to see it back on menus, even in fancy restaurants (though they often call it a savory tart). And thanks to the more educated palates of chefs and cooks everywhere, they're being treated with the respect they deserve.

Don't get confused by names

Quiches and savory tarts are really just different names for very similar dishes. To my mind, a savory tart is a bit more chock full of ingredients than a quiche; conversely, a quiche has a slightly higher proportion of custard to filling than a savory tart. I tend to favor savory tarts because I like the generous flavor of the filling; but I don't neglect my custards: I make them rich and flavorful, and I cook my tarts just so the custard sets but doesn't overcook and become weepy.

Both quiches and savory tarts can be baked in either porcelain or metal tart pans. I favor baking savory tarts in short-sided pans, while quiche can be nice in slightly deeper pans. Either way, the fluted sides are essential, since they keep the crust from collapsing. I like porcelain (or ceramic) pans because I think they retain heat better and provide a crisper crust. They're also

attractive enough to go straight to the table, and so you don't need to unmold the tart.

Make a rich custard and precook the filling ingredients

For the custard, I use only cream and fresh eggs. Some cooks try to lighten the mix by using milk or even (horrors) low-fat milk, but this is a mistake. The whole point of a tart or quiche is the rich, binding nature of the custard. Skimp on the custard and you'll get a watery, sad-looking tart.

I generally blend the cream and eggs by hand with a whisk. Once they're well combined, I add a pinch of salt, a few grinds of pepper, and any other herbs or spices (a pinch of nutmeg or cayenne is a good addition). You can make the custard hours ahead, as long as you cover and refrigerate it, but don't hold it for long once the filling ingredients are added to it.

Cheese is a natural marriage with custard, and here you can be creative. Goat cheese, blue cheese (especially the mild Gorgonzola dolce), and Stilton are wonderful with custards, as are Gruyère and Comté. I also like to use fresh herbs like parsley, thyme, sage, chervil, and sometimes a bit of rosemary. Keep in mind that milder herbs, like parsley, chervil, and dill—lose some of their oomph when cooked, so use generous amounts.

The most successful quiches or tarts are made with members of the allium family: onions, leeks, chives, or scallions. I find it's best to precook these, and most other filling ingredients, so that they don't leak moisture into the tart. Sauté leeks, shallots, and onions in butter and then cool and drain them well. Be sure to cook meats like sausage and bacon and drain them of all fat.

Once all the filling ingredients are prepared, carefully ladle the custard and filling into the shell. Be careful not to overfill, as the custard will puff, and if the custard seeps over the sides, you'll have a heck of a time getting the tart unmolded.

Use the food processor for a buttery tart dough

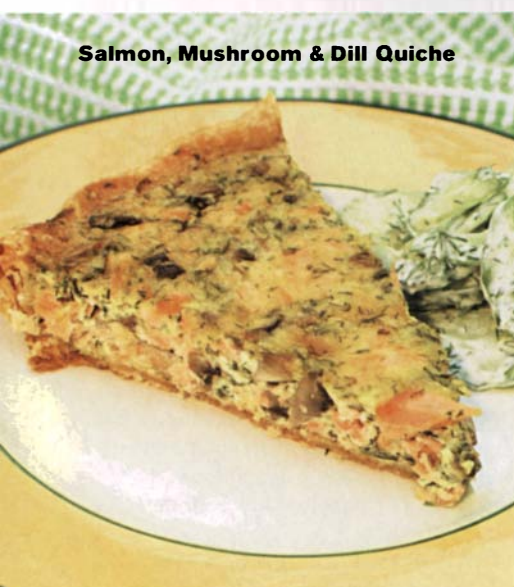
When it comes to making a crust for your tart or quiche, you may need to practice a bit. There's nothing simpler than making a

A buttery crust, rich custard, and gutsy fillings make the savory tart a rediscovered favorite

BY PERLA MEYERS



Spinach, Goat Cheese & Chive Quiche



Salmon, Mushroom & Dill Quiche

Metal on metal makes an extra-crisp crust. Perla Meyers puts a baking sheet under a metal tart pan (above) for easier handling and to ensure a crisp crust.



Alsatian Onion Tart



Cabbage, Leek & Onion Tart



Turn the tart dough out of the food processor when the dough is just holding together but hasn't quite formed a ball.

Tart crust tips

- ◆ Do keep your flour, water, and butter very cold; leave them in the refrigerator until the very last minute.
- ◆ Do cut the butter into tiny cubes; you will be less likely to overwork the dough.
- ◆ Don't overwork the dough; process until it's just beginning to form a ball.
- ◆ Don't mash the dough into a ball; flatten it gently into a disk and wrap in plastic wrap; it will be much easier to roll out.
- ◆ Do let the dough rest for at least an hour in the refrigerator before rolling; this allows the gluten to relax and makes for a flakier crust.
- ◆ Do keep your work surface cold when rolling; rub ice packs or ice-filled plastic bags on it if you don't have a marble pastry board.
- ◆ Do use a straight French rolling pin instead of a standard pin; the French pin lets you control the dough better.



Unroll the dough over the pan and press it in without stretching it. Pull some of the overhang inward to form a ½ inch lip.

crust, and yet it can be devilishly frustrating. I make mine in a food processor, as I find it doesn't overwork the dough. I have also discovered that the less liquid I add, the less it shrinks. You can take most of the guesswork out of making and handling a tart crust by following the dos and don'ts I've included here (see the sidebar above).

In a pinch, it's okay to use a store-bought pie crust to make a tart or quiche, but look for ones made with lard that aren't already molded into a tin, as the shape won't work. Even better, you can use frozen puff pastry, which works perfectly in savory tarts and quiches. Any dough you use must be partially baked (blind-baked) before filling. If you like, brush the bottom of the shells with egg wash, or even mustard, as extra protection to keep the crust crisp.

I find that the best way to serve a tart or quiche is at room temperature (but you can certainly serve them warm); it's much easier to unmold and cut them, and the flavors have had a chance to come together just right. They also reheat marvelously the next day.

I've included recipes for some of my favorite savory tarts here. The Alsatian Onion Tart and the Cabbage, Leek & Bacon Tart are classics. My friends all love the Spinach, Goat Cheese & Chive Quiche; it's a takeoff on a Provençal pie that is usually made with bread dough. Less traditional but flavor-packed, the Salmon, Mushroom & Dill Quiche is ideal for dinner. Here you can use leftover grilled or pan-seared salmon and add a touch of tarragon, chives, or chervil. It's great with a platter of steamed, buttered asparagus or crunchy glazed cucumbers. All of the recipes call for ingredients that are easily available, and their flavors are simple and straightforward.

RECIPES

Basic Tart Dough

Before making the dough, check your filling recipe for the size shell you'll need. To make enough dough for a 10-inch porcelain quiche dish or a 10½- or 11-inch metal tart pan with removable bottom, measure your ingredients using the first list below. To make enough dough for a 12-inch porcelain quiche dish or a 12½-inch metal tart pan with removable bottom, use the second ingredient list. The method is the same for both.

FOR ONE 10- TO 11-INCH TART SHELL:

6¾ oz. (1½ cups) all-purpose unbleached flour

¼ tsp. plus a pinch of salt

4½ oz. (9 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces and chilled

4 Tbs. ice water

FOR ONE 12- TO 12½ -INCH TART SHELL:

9 oz. (2 cups) all-purpose unbleached flour

½ tsp. salt

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces and chilled

6 Tbs. ice water

To make the dough—In a food processor, combine the flour, salt, and butter. Using short pulses, process until the mixture resembles oatmeal. Add the ice water and pulse quickly until the mixture begins to come together—don't let it actually form a ball. Transfer the mixture to a lightly floured surface and gather it into a ball with your hands. Gently flatten the ball into a smooth disk about 1½ inches thick and wrap it in plastic or foil. Refrigerate until firm enough to roll, at least 1 hour.

To roll and shape the shell—Roll the dough on a lightly floured surface into a circle about ⅛ inch thick. Roll the dough over your rolling pin and lift it over the tart pan. Unroll it loosely over the tart pan and gently press the dough into the pan without stretching it. Fold a bit of the excess dough inward (see the



Roll the rolling pin back and forth over the pan. This will sever the excess dough from the outside of the pan.



Unfold the dough lip and press it into the pan's sides with two fingers to create a double layer around the sides of the shell.

photos above) to form a lip. Roll the rolling pin back and forth over the pan. Remove the severed dough from the outside of the pan. Unfold the lip of dough and press it down into the sides of the pan to form a double thickness. Prick the bottom of the shell all over with a fork, cover with aluminum foil, and freeze for at least 30 min. and as long as overnight. At this point, the shell can also be wrapped and kept frozen for up to 2 weeks.

To partially bake the shell—Arrange a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F. Remove the foil, line the frozen shell with parchment or fresh foil, fill it with dried beans or pie weights, and put it on a baking sheet. Bake until the sides are set, about 12 min. Remove the parchment and weights and continue to bake until the dough is just beginning to brown lightly, another 6 to 8 min. Cool on a wire rack until needed.

Alsatian Onion Tart

This classic French regional tart—good Gruyère and “melted” onions, bound with a savory custard—is one of my favorites. For an interesting variation, brush the prebaked tart shell with a thin layer of Dijon mustard, or add 1 Tbs. of finely minced tarragon to the custard. Be sure to buy the best-quality Gruyère. *Serves four for supper, eight as a starter.*

2 Tbs. vegetable oil
2 Tbs. butter
4 medium onions, cut in half and very thinly sliced
A sprinkling of sugar
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 large eggs
1¼ cups heavy cream
A tiny pinch nutmeg (preferably freshly grated)
½ cup (about 1¼ oz.) finely grated Gruyère cheese
1 partially baked tart shell in a 10-inch porcelain quiche pan or a 10½- or 11-inch metal tart pan (see the recipe opposite)

Heat the oil and butter in a cast-iron or other heavy-based 10- to 12-inch skillet. Add the onions and sugar, season with salt and pepper, and sauté over medium-high heat, stirring frequently, until lightly browned. Lower the heat and continue to cook the onions until very soft and evenly browned, stirring frequently, another 30 to 40 min.; you may need to add a little more oil. When the onions are done, transfer them to a strainer and drain.

Heat the oven to 375°F. If using a tart pan with a removable bottom, put it on a baking sheet. In a bowl, whisk together the eggs and cream. Season with ¾ tsp. salt, a scant ½ tsp. pepper, and the nutmeg. Add the drained onions and half of the cheese and blend thoroughly. Fill the prepared tart shell with the onions and custard. Top with the remaining cheese and bake until the tip of a knife comes out clean and the top of the tart is puffed and brown, 40 to 45 min. Let cool for at least 15 to 20 min. before serving.

Salmon, Mushroom & Dill Quiche

I like to serve this quiche with a crunchy cucumber salad, dressed with a little sour cream and dill; together they make a nice supper. Use poached, sautéed, or baked salmon; or you can cook raw salmon fillet by microwaving it on high for 6 to 8 min. (or until just cooked through). *Serves eight as part of a light supper.*

3 Tbs. unsalted butter
½ lb. small cremini mushrooms, stems removed, caps thinly sliced
4 medium scallions (2 inches of green removed), thinly sliced
2 extra-large eggs
2 extra-large egg yolks
1½ cups heavy cream
¾ lb. (12 oz.) cooked salmon, flaked or broken apart into bite-size pieces (about 1¼ cups)
3 Tbs. finely minced fresh dill
⅓ cup finely grated *parmigiano reggiano*
1 tsp. salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground pepper (preferably white)
1 partially baked tart shell in a 12-inch porcelain quiche pan or a 12½-inch metal tart pan (see the recipe opposite)
8 to 10 small whole dill sprigs for garnish

In a 10-inch skillet, melt half of the butter over medium heat. Raise the heat to medium high. Add the sliced mushrooms and sauté, stirring frequently, until they're nicely browned around the edges and somewhat softened. Add the rest of the butter and the scallions and cook until the scallions are soft. Set aside to cool.

In a bowl, whisk together the eggs, yolks, and heavy cream until smooth and well blended. Add the mushroom-scallion mixture, the flaked salmon, the minced dill, and the *parmigiano reggiano*. Season with the salt and pepper. *(Recipe continues)*



A partially baked shell (above) should be lightly browned and dry all over. Cool before filling.

Don't burn your arms. Set a hot metal tart pan on a large can and let the ring drop away.



Heat the oven to 350°F. If using a tart pan with a removable bottom, put it on a baking sheet. Pour the salmon and mushroom mixture into the prepared shell, making sure that the filling is evenly distributed, and bake until the custard is set and the tip of a knife comes out clean and the top is golden brown, 40 to 45 min. Let cool for 15 to 20 min. before serving. Garnish each serving with a sprig of fresh dill.

Cabbage, Leek & Bacon Tart

This is a great cool-weather tart. The flavors of the leeks, Savoy cabbage, and bacon go so well together, and they can also enjoy the company of a variety of cheeses, including Fontina and Stilton, besides the Gruyère. Serve this tart on its own or accompanied by a well-seasoned salad. A dollop of good homemade tomato sauce is nice with this, too. *Serves six to eight.*

- 1 small head Savoy cabbage**
- Salt**
- 2 medium leeks, all but 2 inches of the light green part removed**
- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- ½ lb. slab bacon, cut into ¼-inch cubes, blanched and thoroughly dried**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 extra-large eggs**
- 1 cup heavy cream**
- 3 oz. (¾ cup) coarsely grated Gruyère cheese**
- 1 partially baked tart shell in a 12-inch porcelain quiche pan or a 12½-inch metal tart pan (see the recipe on p. 62)**
- ¼ cup freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano***

Remove and discard the outer leaves of the cabbage and cut the cabbage into quarters. Bring plenty of salted water to a boil in a large pot; add the cabbage and cook just until tender, 10 to 12 min. Drain well. When cool enough to handle, put the cabbage in a cotton kitchen towel and wring out all the excess moisture. Cut out and discard the pieces of core. Slice the cabbage crosswise into very fine strips and measure out 2 cups, tightly packed (save the remainder to add to a soup or sauté).

Cut the leeks in half lengthwise and then crosswise into ¼-inch slices. Put the sliced leeks in a colander and rinse thoroughly under warm water. Drain well and set aside.

In a large, heavy skillet, melt the butter over medium heat, add the bacon, and sauté until browned. Remove with a slotted spoon to a side dish and reserve. Discard all but 2 Tbs. of the fat in the skillet; add the leeks and 2 Tbs. water, and simmer over low heat until tender, 5 to 7 min. Add the shredded cabbage and reserved bacon, season with salt and pepper (this is a good time to taste for seasoning), and sauté over medium heat for 5 min., stirring often. Set aside until completely cooled.

Heat the oven to 350°F. If using a tart pan with a removable bottom, put it on a baking sheet. In a large bowl, combine the eggs and cream and whisk until well blended. Stir in the cabbage mixture and Gruyère. Pour into the prepared tart shell, spread evenly and sprinkle with the *parmigiano reggiano*. Bake until the custard has set and the top is lightly browned, 35 to 40 min. Let cool for 15 to 20 min. before serving.

Spinach, Goat Cheese & Chive Quiche

I like to serve this quiche accompanied by a salad of baby spinach leaves dressed with a shallot vinaigrette. You can substitute a good sheep's milk cheese like Brin d'Amour for the goat cheese if you like. *Serves four to six.*

- 10 oz. fresh spinach, stemmed and washed**
- 2 large eggs**
- 2 large egg yolks**
- 1½ cups heavy cream**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup semi-dry finely crumbled goat cheese, such as Bucheron**
- 2 to 3 Tbs. finely snipped chives**
- 1 Tbs. finely minced fresh thyme**
- ⅓ cup freshly grated *parmigiano reggiano***
- 1 partially baked tart shell in a 10-inch porcelain quiche pan or a 10½- to 11-inch metal tart pan (see the recipe on p. 62)**

In a large saucepan, bring 1 cup water to a boil. Add the spinach and cook until just wilted, 2 or 3 min. Drain and set aside. In a bowl, combine the eggs, yolks, and heavy cream. Season the mixture with salt and pepper and whisk until thoroughly blended. Add the finely crumbled goat cheese, chives, thyme, and *parmigiano reggiano*. Set aside.

Put the spinach in a kitchen towel and squeeze out all the moisture; you should have a ball measuring about ⅔ cup. Mince the spinach and add it to the custard. Blend well.

Heat the oven to 375°F. If using a tart pan with a removable bottom, put it on a baking sheet. Pour the spinach and goat cheese custard into the prepared tart shell, being careful that it doesn't overflow. Put the tart on a baking sheet and bake until the filling is nicely puffed and browned, 40 to 50 min. Let cool for at least 15 to 20 min. before serving.

Perla Meyers is the author of Spur of the Moment Cook, Fresh from the Garden, The Seasonal Kitchen, and Perla Meyers' Art of Seasonal Cooking. She lives in New York City. ♦

Sole and Scallop Timbales

Layers of sole and scallop mousse baked in a mold—topped with a satiny sauce and a dab of caviar—make a knockout first course

BY DANIEL PATTERSON



"If you give these timbales a bit of time, attention, and patience, the results will be wonderful," says Daniel Patterson.

A timbale—which is the name of both the finished dish and the dish it's cooked in—is great for entertaining. A timbale may take a bit more advance preparation than, say, grilled fish, but when it comes time for the final cooking and assembly, it's actually easier. You fill the individual molds with layers of fish fillet and scallop mousse, cook them gently in a water bath, and then finish them with a *beurre blanc*, the classic French butter sauce (and a touch of luxurious caviar, which tastes and looks beautiful). You'll get consistent and delicious results, the presentation will be fantastic, and be-

First, make the scallop mousseline



The scallops, egg, and cream need a brief whirl in the food processor. Take care not to overmix.



For the most delicate texture, force the mousseline through a sieve. A stiff scraper works well.

cause of all you can do ahead, you'll have more time to spend with your guests.

Choose a timbale mold by capacity, not just diameter

To cook this fish timbale, I'm using ramekins that hold 4 ounces. My ramekins happen to be 2½ to 3 inches wide and about 1½ inches deep, but for the final yield, capacity is much more important than dimension (3-inch ramekins can hold anywhere from 4 to 8 ounces). You can use molds of ceramic or stainless steel, or even a nonstick muffin tin; however, stay away from aluminum, cast iron, or any other reactive material that would alter the delicate flavors of the fish. At the restaurant, I sometimes use circular stainless-steel timbale molds that you can find in various sizes at restaurant-supply stores. If you do use metal molds, keep in mind that the timbale will cook more quickly than it will in a ceramic mold.

The fish is the star, so buy the very best

The most important step of any fish dish is buying the best-quality fish; if you can, get to know a reputable fish merchant.

When choosing fillet of sole, look for firm, shiny flesh that smells like the ocean, with no fishy odor. If the fish is whole, be sure it has glistening skin, clear eyes protruding from their sockets, and deep red color in the gills, and then get your fishmonger to fillet it. (Searching out whole sole and having it filleted is worth the trouble, because chances are you'll get a fresher, better-tasting fish.)

When choosing sea scallops, look for firm-textured flesh and a sweet, musky smell, again, with no fishy odor. Stay away from "soaked" or "wet" scallops, which have been chemically treated. This compromises flavor and causes the scallops to retain water, affecting the quality of your scallop mousseline. (For more on choosing scallops, see *Fine Cooking* #34, p. 68.) At this time of year, you'll find excellent scallops coming from Canada, from off the coast of Massachusetts, and from the Sea of Cortez in Mexico. From November to April, look for in-shore scallops from Maine, often called "day boat" or diver-harvested scallops; this is the most specific indicator of very fresh scallops.

For the lightest mousseline, chill the ingredients and process briefly

A mousseline is an emulsion of fat (in this case, cream) into protein (scallops and eggs). In this recipe, the scallop mousseline binds the timbale and serves as a light-textured complement to the sweet flavor and delicate texture of the sole. Processing ingredients while they're cold will help you get the smoothest result.

The mousseline needs just a brief whirl in the processor. Stick to the 10-second interval I've specified in the recipe; overmixing the mousseline will make the timbale tough and rubbery, rather than tender and light. If your kitchen is very warm, pass the mousseline through the sieve in batches, keeping what you're not working on in the refrigerator. After you get the hang of making a mousseline,

line, you might want to experiment with different fish: sole and salmon are two others that work well in mousselines. Try making fish quenelles by scooping ovals of cold mousseline with a spoon dipped in hot water and poaching them in lobster or fish stock.

A water bath ensures gentle, even cooking

Cooking these timbales is the easiest part. I'm using a water bath to keep the cooking slow and controlled so the sole cooks in the same amount of time it takes for the mousseline to set. Any ovenproof pan will do; just be sure the pan is wide enough to fit the molds and deep enough to fill with water to go halfway up the sides of the molds.

There are a few ways to check doneness, as you'll see in the recipe. To be absolutely certain, you can even slice a tiny section out of the top of one of the molds. (The top will become the bottom of the timbale when you invert it, thus hiding the missing sliver, but be sure to serve that timbale to yourself.)

A satiny *beurre blanc* needs great butter and gentle heat

Beurre blanc is a sauce made by whisking chunks of cold butter into a reduction of white wine, white-wine vinegar, shallots, and often peppercorns and herbs. The butter should be the best quality you can find; high in fat, low in water, with a sweet, full flavor. At the restaurant, we use *Président*, imported from France. I also like *Plugrà*, a European style butter made in New Jersey. Excellent American artisan dairies, such as Egg Farm Dairy in New York State and Straus Creamery in California, make delicious butter as well.

Cook and hold *beurre blanc* over low heat. If the heat is too high, the butterfat will separate from

the solids and the sauce will break. I recommend doing the reduction an hour or so in advance and then taking it off the heat (a little evaporation will occur, which is fine). While the timbales are cooking, put the *beurre blanc* pan over a very low flame and start whisking in the butter as soon as the pan is warm (not hot). Serve the *beurre blanc* right after making it, or else hold it in a bowl above gently simmering water for up to 30 minutes.

A classic *beurre blanc* has nothing in it to stabilize the emulsion, such as cream, which perhaps is why it has a reputation of being finicky. If you're worried about the sauce breaking, however, add a few tablespoons of cream at the end of the wine reduction, before whisking in the butter.

RECIPE

Individual Timbales of Sole & Scallop Mousseline with Chive *Beurre Blanc*

Use eight 4-ounce molds. This is a great first or fish course for a dinner party, or it could be the main course for a special lunch. For dinner, follow with a simple main course, like grilled meat with a light sauce and just-dug potatoes roasted in their skins. For lunch, start with a salad of sweet lettuces tossed in a simple vinaigrette and end with a berry tart or fresh fruit and sorbet. Don't forget a good loaf of bread. *Yields eight 2½- to 3-inch timbales; serves eight as a first course.*

FOR THE SCALLOP MOUSSELINE:

14 oz. sea scallops, rinsed and patted dry
1 large egg
½ tsp. coarse salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground white pepper
1 cup heavy cream, chilled

(Ingredient list continues)

Sole fillets need slicing and shaping



Split the sole fillets lengthwise (if they're more than ½ inch thick) to make ¼-inch-thick fillets. Press each fillet to a uniform thickness of ⅛ inch.



Imprint circles on the fish using a cookie cutter equal in diameter to your molds.



Cut out the sole circles with kitchen shears. Make as many circles as you can and save all the scraps.

Assemble the timbales and bake gently



The bottom of the mold becomes the top of the timbale. Set the nicest circles in the bottom of each mold, and then pipe or spoon in a layer of the mousseline.

FOR THE TIMBALES:

Butter for greasing the molds
1 recipe Scallop Mousseline (see previous page)
1¼ lb. sole, skinned, fat trimmed, bones removed
Salt and freshly ground white pepper

FOR THE LEEKS:

1 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 large leeks, roots and dark green parts removed, white and light green parts halved lengthwise, rinsed well, and cut crosswise into ¾-inch slices

FOR THE BEURRE BLANC:

1 large shallot, thinly sliced
2 cups dry white wine, preferably Sauvignon Blanc
½ tsp. good-quality white-wine vinegar
7 whole black peppercorns
3 sprigs fresh thyme
12 oz. (24 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1½ Tbs. snipped fresh chives
Salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste
Fresh lemon juice to taste

FOR THE GARNISH:

¾ to 1½ oz. (4 to 8 tsp.) imported or domestic caviar (I prefer osetra)
8 small sprigs fresh chervil

To make the mousseline—Combine the scallops and the egg in a food processor; sprinkle the salt and white pepper over them. Turn on the processor and add the cream through the feed tube. Process until the mixture is smooth; about 10 seconds total. Don't overprocess or the mousse will turn out rubbery. With a stiff rubber spatula or scraper, force the mixture through a medium-fine mesh sieve into a bowl. Check the seasoning by steaming a dab of mousseline for 1 to 2 min. or until cooked through. Taste and adjust seasonings if needed. Cover and chill the mousse until it's time to assemble the timbales.



If you run out of circles, use scraps to complete the layers, cutting small pieces to fit gaps and create even layers.



For the gentlest heat, bake the molds in a water bath. The author uses a skillet, but any ovenproof pan will do.

To trim the sole and assemble the timbales—Butter the bottom and sides of eight 4-oz. molds. If the sole fillets are more than ½ inch thick, split each one lengthwise to make ¼-inch-thick fillets. Wrap a ramekin tightly in plastic. Using the bottom, gently press each fillet to a uniform thickness of ⅛ inch. Start near the center and gently push outward toward the edges, taking care not to tear the fish. Using a sharp 2-inch cookie cutter (or one that's equal in diameter to the inside of the mold you're using), mark circles in the fish. With kitchen shears, cut out the circles. Make as many circles as you can

and save all the scraps. Take the eight neatest circles and place one in each buttered timbale mold, with the side the skin was on facing up (the bottom of the ramekin becomes the top of the finished, unmolded timbale). Lightly season each with salt and pepper. Using a pastry bag with a plain tip (or no tip), pipe or spoon a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch-thick layer of scallop mousseline into each mold. Using the rest of the sole circles if you have any, as well as the sole scraps, add another layer of sole to each mold, cutting small pieces to fit any gaps so that the layers are even. Gently press on the sole to even out the mousseline underneath and to force out any air pockets. Again, season lightly with salt and pepper. Repeat with another layer of mousseline. Season lightly. Finish with a final layer of sole. Seal each mold with plastic wrap; refrigerate.

To braise the leeks—Melt the butter in a small saucepan over low heat. Add the thoroughly rinsed, sliced leeks (there's no need to dry them). Cover the pan and cook very gently, adding water if the pan gets too dry (the leeks shouldn't brown). Cook until very soft and tender, 20 to 25 min. Set aside and keep warm until it's time to assemble the timbales.

To make the *beurre blanc* reduction—Put the shallot, wine, vinegar, peppercorns, and thyme in a nonreactive saucepan. Simmer, reducing, until 1 Tbs. liquid remains. Remove from the heat and reserve. (You can make the reduction up to an hour ahead.)

To cook the timbales—Heat the oven to 325°F. Put the wrapped timbales in an ovenproof pan large enough to hold all the molds. Fill the pan with enough hot water to come halfway up the sides of the molds.

Bake until the timbale feels firm but is still jiggly, 20 to 23 min. (it will have shrunk slightly from the sides of the mold and will be quite tender even when fully cooked). Insert a paring knife into the underside of a timbale; the knife tip should come out warm when you touch it to your lip.



A satiny *beurre blanc* needs straining. Set the sauce over a barely simmering water bath to keep it warm.

Finish the *beurre blanc*—Heat the reduction over low heat. When the pan is warm and the liquid is just about gone, whisk in the butter a few pieces at a time, whisking constantly to get a smooth emulsion. Strain the sauce through a fine mesh sieve into a clean saucepan, pressing on the solids and then discarding them. Stir in the chives, taste the sauce, and adjust as needed with salt, white pepper, and a few drops of lemon juice. Set the *beurre blanc* over a barely simmering water bath to keep it warm.

To serve—Divide the braised leeks evenly among eight warmed plates. Unwrap the timbale and turn them out onto a flat plate lined with a kitchen towel. Gently blot each timbale dry and set each one on the braised leeks. Ladle a generous 2 to 3 Tbs. *beurre blanc* onto each timbale. Garnish each with $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 tsp. caviar and a tiny sprig of chervil.

Putting together this dish is easy if you set up the plates and components assembly-line style.

Daniel Patterson is the chef-owner of Restaurant Elisabeth Daniel in San Francisco. ♦



The finished timbale will slip easily out of its mold. Blot the timbales dry before you plate them.



Three Sweet Breads from One Simple Dough

Make a butter cake, a chocolate braid, or cinnamon “chrysanthemums,” all from the same yeast-risen dough

BY MAGGIE GLEZER

All bakers have at least one dough that’s a versatile, indispensable element of their repertoire. Call it the pastry equivalent of the Little Black Dress: a faithful classic that you can dress up all sorts of ways and is appropriate for any occasion. This sweet dough is like that for me. From one basic recipe, I make three delicious and totally different sweet breads. German Butter Cake, Russian Chocolate Braid, and Cinnamon Chrysanthemums all use the same dough, but because each is shaped and finished differently (the sheet cake with butter, sour cream, and sugar; the braid with pastry cream and chocolate chips; the mums with cinnamon sugar), I get three unique results, all just rich and sweet enough for morning coffee, afternoon tea, or weekend brunch.

You can even decide at the last minute which of these sweet breads to make: the dough can sit in the fridge for up to four days before shaping and baking.

All-purpose flour gives a light, tender crumb

For a flavorful, tender result, these breads need a light, silky dough. So, a few details are quite important.



One dough, multiple identities.
Here, it’s twisted into a Russian Chocolate Braid.

Use all-purpose flour with a protein content of around 10% (the nutritional information will declare 3 grams of protein per 29 to 30 grams of flour). Bread flour, whose protein content is around 12% (4 grams of protein per 30 grams of flour), absorbs more liquid and produces a sweet bread that’s tougher, with more volume and less flavor.

Add moisture with a mashed potato. You’ll add it to the dough during the initial mix. If you’ve never run across this Old World touch—which I learned from my grandmother-in-law—it might seem strange, but in addition to giving a moister texture and helping the dough stay fresh longer, it heightens flavor. The sour cream helps, too, adding tang.

Knead both with the food processor and by hand, processing the dough for thirty seconds to a minute and then kneading it on the countertop for half a minute. You’ll repeat this two-step kneading a couple of times. I like to do it this way so the dough can go for a good run in the food processor and then cool off with a brief hand-kneading spell on the counter. You’ll get a better-developed dough and a



Photos: Scott Phillips



RECIPES

Sour Cream & Potato Sweet Dough

Use a food processor that holds at least 7 cups.
Yields 1 pound dough, enough for one Russian Chocolate Braid, one German Butter Cake, or ten Chrysanthemums; it can be doubled.

- 8 oz. (1 ½ cups) plus 3 Tbs. unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 1 tsp. instant yeast (Red Star QuickRise, Saf's Perfect Rise, Fleischmann's RapidRise, or bread machine yeast)**
- 3 Tbs. water**
- 1 very small potato, peeled, boiled, and sieved (to yield ¼ cup)**
- 2 large egg yolks**
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract**
- ¼ cup sour cream**
- 3 Tbs. sugar**
- ½ tsp. salt**
- 1 ½ oz. (3 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter**

FOR ONE GERMAN BUTTER CAKE:

- 1 ½ oz. (3 Tbs.) cold unsalted butter**
- ¼ cup sour cream**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- ½ cup sliced almonds**

(Recipe list continues)

Make the braid
 by entwining two
 halves of cream-
 filled, chocolate-
 studded dough
 cylinders.

loftier finished result, with less work. If you don't have a food processor with at least a seven-cup capacity and a strong motor, you can knead the dough completely by hand; it just requires a few more minutes.

Knead the dough almost to completion before adding the salt, sugar, and butter. Gluten is the bubble-trapping protein found in wheat doughs that allows leavened bread to rise; kneading bread dough helps the gluten bond and form a strong elastic network. Sugar, butter, and salt interfere with gluten network formation. So, by holding off on adding these ingredients and letting the gluten develop optimally, the final bread will be much lighter and higher rising.

Mix the dough ahead and tuck it in the fridge. It will be fine there for up to four days. Three or four hours before you plan to shape and bake, take it out of the fridge: the final fermentation can take place as the dough comes to room temperature. The extended stay in the fridge helps add flavor nuances to the finished bread, too, but don't let the dough sit longer than four days, or it will overferment (it won't rise as well, and it may take on off flavors and a grayish cast).

The dough goes through three stages: firm to sticky to silky



During the initial mix, the dough will be quite stiff.



After you add the sugar, the dough becomes sticky.



When the butter goes in, the dough turns soft, supple, and smooth.

FOR TEN CINNAMON CHRYSANTHEMUMS:

1½ cups sugar mixed with 1½ tsp. ground cinnamon
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) hot melted butter

FOR ONE RUSSIAN CHOCOLATE BRAID:

1 cup Pastry Cream (see the recipe opposite)
½ cup mini chocolate chips, semi- or bittersweet
1 large egg, beaten

To assemble the dough—In a large mixing bowl, mix the 3 Tbs. flour with the yeast and then whisk in the water. Let the mixture sit covered until it has begun to puff up, 10 to 15 min. Fit a large-capacity food processor with the metal blade. Put the remaining flour in the workbowl and then add the yeast mixture, potato, egg yolks, vanilla, and sour cream. Process the dough for about 1 min. Remove it from the machine and knead it by hand on an unfloured countertop for 1 min. to redistribute the heat. The dough will be very stiff at this point. Continue this alternating kneading: process for 30 seconds and

then knead on the counter for about 30 seconds, until the dough is very smooth (this should take 2 to 3 processing rounds). Put the dough back in the food processor and add the sugar and salt, kneading again in the processor and then on the counter until the sugar has dissolved (the dough will soften considerably and become very sticky; this is okay). Finally, return the dough to the processor, add the butter, and do another alternating kneading round until the butter is well incorporated and the dough is very soft and smooth, about 1 min. The dough won't clean the bowl at this point. It's okay if it feels quite soft and warm after processing; kneading the dough on the counter will help it cool down and firm up. Transfer the dough to a container at least four times its volume (no need to grease the container); seal well. (At this point, the dough can instead be rolled in flour and then sealed in a plastic bag and refrigerated for up to 4 days. If you do mix ahead and chill the dough, pull it out of the fridge 3 to 4 hours before baking.) Let the dough ferment at room temperature for about 3 hours or until it's expanded to 3 times its volume and an indent remains when you press it with a floured finger.

For the German Butter Cake—Press the dough into a 9x13-inch rectangle that will fit into a well-buttered 9x13-inch baking pan. Press the dough sheet into the pan (don't worry about any folds—they'll add to the cake's character). Cover the pan and proof the dough until it looks puffy but hasn't doubled in volume, about 1½ hours. Cut the chilled butter into tiny chunks and scatter them evenly on the dough surface. Push the butter chunks down to the bottom of the dough with your fingertip, taking care not to poke all the way through to the pan. Spread the dough with the sour cream and then sprinkle it with the sugar and sliced almonds. Position an oven rack on the top spot and then heat the oven to 400°F. Cover and proof the shaped dough until it's large, puffy, and remains indented when lightly pressed with your fingertip, about ½ hour. Bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 min., rotating the pan halfway through baking. Let cool on a rack.

A perfect partner for a cup of coffee, German Butter Cake gets its character from sour cream, butter, and sliced almonds.



For the Chrysanthemums—Put the cinnamon sugar on a large plate and line a heavy baking sheet (or an insulated sheet or two sheets sandwiched together) with parchment or butter it. Roll the dough into an 8x20-inch rectangle. Cut it into ten 2x8-inch strips. Make sure the melted butter is quite warm. Dip each strip of dough into the butter, covering both sides, and then dredge it in the cinnamon-sugar on both sides, coating the strips evenly. Using a bench or a knife, cut a deep fringe the entire length of each strip, spacing the cuts about ¼ inch apart. Roll the strips up to form the chrysanthemums, pinching the bottoms to seal them (see the photo at right). Position them upright on the baking sheet, spreading and arranging the petals attractively. Position an oven rack on the top spot and heat the oven to 400°F. Cover and proof the shaped dough until it's large, puffy, and remains indented when lightly pressed with your fingertip, about ½ hour. Bake until brown, about 15 min., rotating the pan halfway through baking. Let cool on a rack.

For the Russian Chocolate Braid—Line a heavy baking sheet (or an insulated sheet or two sheets sandwiched together) with parchment or butter it. Roll the dough into a rectangle about 13x16 inches and about ⅛ inch thick. Stir the chilled pastry cream to soften it and then spread it over the dough in a thin layer. Scatter the chocolate chips evenly over the surface. Roll the rectangle into a cylinder from the wider side and pinch the long edge to seal. Put the cylinder on the baking sheet. Cut the cylinder in half lengthwise, splitting it into two thin strips. Arrange the strips parallel to one another so that the filling is facing up, push them together, and wrap them around each other to form a twist, working from the center. Position an oven rack in the middle on the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Cover the shaped dough and proof until it's large, puffy, and remains indented when lightly pressed with your fingertip, about 45 min. Brush the dough with the beaten egg, taking care not to smear the filling or dislodge the chocolate bits. Bake until golden brown, about 35 min., rotating the pan halfway through baking. Let cool on a rack for 1 hour before slicing.

Pastry Cream for the Russian Chocolate Braid

This is a very stiff pastry cream that can hold up in the braid without oozing out. Make the pastry cream just after you make the dough to allow it enough time to cool. *Yields 1 cup.*

1 cup milk
2-inch piece vanilla bean, slashed lengthwise, seeds scraped out, or ½ tsp. vanilla extract
¼ cup sugar
3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
¼ tsp. salt
2 large egg yolks

In a medium saucepan, warm the milk over medium heat (if you're using a vanilla bean, add it now) just until a skin forms. Take the pan off the heat. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the sugar, flour, and salt. Add the yolks, beating with a wooden spoon.

Whisk in the warm milk in a thin stream, whisking constantly. Return the milk mixture to the saucepan. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until the mixture is extremely thick and gluey (you'll need to switch to a wooden spoon), about 5 min. If you're using vanilla extract, stir it in now. Immediately force the pastry cream through a sieve. Gently press a sheet of waxed paper or plastic onto the surface of the hot pastry cream to prevent a skin from forming. Let cool and then refrigerate until ready to use it.

Maggie Glezer writes about breadmaking. Her book, Artisan Baking across America (Artisan Books) is due out this October. ♦



Dough strips are dredged in cinnamon sugar, fringed, and then rolled.



The fringes are arranged before baking to form "petals."



With Cutting Boards, More Is Better

Having a few on hand makes food prep safer and more efficient

BY JOANNE McALLISTER SMART

For many, many years, I've owned just two cutting boards, both plastic. When I began to research what's available in cutting boards for this article, I bought a bunch and tried them out at home. I kept a stack of them on top of my fridge and a few more hanging on a hook closer to where I do most of my prep work. After chopping, slicing, and dicing on them over the course of a few months, the single most important thing I learned from having a lot of different cutting boards at my disposal is that I really like having a lot of different cutting boards at my disposal.

Some boards were definitely called on more than others; those on the hook often got first preference because they were within arm's reach. (Lesson: if you have a hook handy, look for a board you can hang.) A plastic 10x16-inch board that's big enough to slice a London broil yet fits on the hook and in the dishwasher became my favorite. But even though I didn't use a giant (24x18-inch) wooden cutting board of-

ten—mainly because it doesn't fit into my sink to clean—I appreciated its ample size and good looks as I carried pizzas from the grill to the table for slicing.

Not that there weren't clunkers: an otherwise good rubber board sold in restaurant-supply stores that got warped by the sun when stored in the back of my car; all the glass, acrylic, and Corian boards (besides dulling my knives, the clinking sound the knives make on them gives me the shivers); and the really cheap, flat-grain wooden ones that smelled strongly of adhesive (one of which broke apart on a seam with only the gentlest of taps).

But overall, when it comes to cutting boards, if you have the room, the more the merrier. If you're a wood-only kind of cook, try a plastic board; the convenience of tossing the board in the dishwasher is worth the aesthetic difference. If you only use plastic, a wooden board can warm up the look of your kitchen. If you only have a large board, consider a small one (10x7 inches is good) for those times when you need to chop just one shallot for a vinaigrette. If you only have a small one, run out and get a larger one; the extra room will make you say "ahh." And if you don't have a cutting board with a nice deep trench, you'll swear less while carving a roast or chopping tomatoes if you get one that does.

Having a couple of identical boards in your favorite size is also handy: one ready to use while the other is in the dishwasher, or one available to cut the vegetables on after cutting up some raw chicken or beef.

Now that my testing is over, I miss the luxury of choosing from among all those cutting boards. And while I don't necessarily need that unsteady tower of boards on top of my fridge, I'm definitely going to increase my collection (for some examples, see Sources, p. 86). Aside from the two I already own, I plan to get a large wooden board and a mid-size board with a deep trench. That ought to do it—for now.

Joanne McAllister Smart is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦

Getting a grip on wood grains

Butcherblocks were once made from a thick round cut from a tree. This crosswise section of the tree, the **end grain**, provides the hardest, most durable surface. Today, end-grain boards consist of many squares of crosswise-cut pieces glued together to create a thick, stable surface that won't warp. To imagine **edge grain**, picture the tree going through a sawmill. The short side of the plank is the edge grain. It isn't quite as hard as end grain but still very durable. **Flat grain**, the wide side of the plank, is the softest and usually the least expensive. Boards made from flat grain wear quickest and are more prone to warping.



End grain



Edge grain



Flat grain

Simple details can make cutting boards more useful

Plate-like plastic boards are great for prepping and holding components of a dish.

Finger grips cut into thick, heavy boards are helpful.

A handle that doubles as a hanger lets you keep a couple of smaller boards on a hook within reach.

Small cutting boards are handy for small items.

Colorful cutting boards brighten the kitchen—and you can color-code for meats or produce.

A deep trench is a godsend for capturing juices.

A rubber surface keeps food from sliding around.

Using cutting boards safely

About ten years ago, a study suggesting that wooden cutting boards have antibacterial properties got national attention and sent people running out to buy wooden boards. More recent studies by the same scientists seemed to demonstrate that bacteria such as salmonella get absorbed into the wood within a few minutes, leaving the exposed area of the unwashed board free of the potentially harmful microbes. (Many more bacteria were recoverable from unwashed plastic cutting boards in their experiments.) If the wooden board is well dried after washing and remains dry, the absorbed bacteria eventually die. But because different tests (including those performed by NSF International, a non-profit certifier of products relating to

public health, and by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration) have reported contradictory results, the FDA continues to recommend plastic boards mainly because of ease of cleaning, since they are dishwasher-safe.

While the research—and the debate—continues, the best approach to safety is to clean any cutting surface after it comes in contact with raw meat or poultry, either in a dishwasher for plastic cutting boards that fit, or by hand with a solution of a teaspoon of bleach in a quart of water. By the same token, don't be lulled into haphazard cleaning by plastic boards that boast having antibacterial properties: as must be stated on those boards' labels, the treatment protects the *plastic* from bacteria and not

necessarily the *user*. So wash well. Better yet, dedicate one board to meat and poultry and one to everything else.

Don't cut on a moving target. A cutting board that moves around as you chop is not only frustrating and inefficient but also dangerous. A damp cloth or paper towel under the board will hold it in place, as will reusable nonslip cutting board pads (see Sources, p. 86).

Prevent cracks by oiling wooden boards with food-grade mineral oil when they start to look dry. If a wooden board shows signs of wear, have it resurfaced (if it's a thick butcherblock type) or get a new one. A well-worn plastic cutting board should also be replaced: its grooves and scratches can harbor bacteria.



A topping of sautéed apples adds drama to a gingerbread cake that scores high on flavor.



Apple Brown Betty transforms day-old bread into a delicious dessert. Chopped apples and an apple purée pack this dessert with lots of apple flavor.

Baking Homey

Use a sweet-tart apple that holds its shape, and don't bother with the lemon juice

BY KATHLEEN STEWART

If there is a scent that says “home,” it’s the aroma of an apple dessert baking in the oven. Even if you didn’t grow up in a house where such treats were made, the scent of apples and butter, cinnamon, and sugar has an almost primal pull. When we’re making our apple turnovers at my bakery, people follow their noses and come into the shop right off the street. They might leave with something different, but it was that scent that enticed them inside.

I think the nostalgic way people feel about apple desserts is why you don’t often see bakers and pastry chefs messing too much with the notion of what they should be: pies and tarts, crisps and betties, turnovers and cakes, all flavored with sugar and cinnamon. So how do you make these simple, homey treats as delicious as possible? Use the best apples you can find.

Seek out different apple varieties

My favorite apple to bake with is grown locally at Gowan’s Oak Tree in Philo, California, about an hour’s drive from my bakery in Healdsburg. The orchard grows a big, boxy apple called a Sierra Beauty (see the photo below right). It has a great balance of well-developed sugar, which gives it a wonderful flavor and lets it caramelize beautifully, and acid, which keeps the flavor from becoming bland when baked. Sierra Beauties are also really dense—they seem to give off less water than other varieties—so they hold their shape when cooked.

Because I’m so spoiled by these wonderful apples, I haven’t experimented with too many other varieties. Grace Espinoza, a member of the Gowan fam-

Photos: Joanne Smart



Just imagine the heavenly aroma from these warm apple turnovers. Each consists of half an apple surrounded by an irresistibly flaky dough.



Apple crisp and ice cream make a perfect autumn dessert. Serve the crisp warm.

Apple Desserts

ily, says a Gravenstein is probably most similar. Ask your market to start stocking Sierra Beauties: they ship and store well. If you don't live out west, you can mail-order Sierra Beauties (see Sources, p. 86), but the shipping can add up. To do so once, to see how wonderful these recipes can be when made with such a flavorful apple, makes sense. But then go and seek out your own favorite, preferably locally grown variety at its peak flavor time. (For some suggestions culled from growers and other bakers, see the sidebar on p. 80.)

Test which variety you like best by making turnovers. After narrowing down your contenders, make the apple turnovers on p. 81. But instead of filling all eight turnovers with the same apple, fill a couple of turnovers with one variety and a couple with another. Keep track of which turnover had which apples, and then gather some friends for a taste test. Note not only the flavor of the apple—does it come through the cinnamon and sugar, or are you tasting only that?—but its texture as well.



If you've taken my suggestion to find your favorite baking apple, you may wind up with more apples than you know what to do with. (Some varieties will keep for a few months in a cool place; ask the seller.) What I suggest is making a big batch of apple purée (see the sidebar on p. 79), which will keep in the freezer for months.

Peel when you want and ignore the browning

Many recipes suggest immediately tossing peeled apples in lemon juice to keep them from turning brown. That's fine for a Waldorf salad, where brown apples would look unappealing, but if I'm going to bake the apples I generally don't bother. A little surface browning won't affect the apple's flavor (and I think lemon juice does). And once you toss the apples with cinnamon and bake them, sauté them with butter and sugar, or cook them into a purée, they turn darker anyway. I'll peel, core, and slice apples up to a day ahead of using them in a recipe. If kept in an airtight container in the fridge, there's no harm done.



It's easy to core an apple when it's in quarters. Depending on the apple, either bring a paring knife straight across to cut out the core or cut a V-shaped wedge.



Slicing apples on a cutting board is safe and fast, though the author just as often slices them in her hand.

RECIPES

Butterscotch-Topped Gingerbread with Sautéed Apples

This gingerbread is super moist with a dense crumb. Because it cooks at such a low temperature, the baking soda must be activated by the acid in the molasses and the heat of the boiling water before the cake is baked. *Serves twelve.*

FOR THE BUTTERSCOTCH:

3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar

FOR THE CAKE:

$12\frac{1}{2}$ oz. ($2\frac{3}{4}$ cups) cake flour
1 tsp. baking powder
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt
1 Tbs. ground ginger
1 Tbs. ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ground cloves
4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
1 tsp. plus $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda
1 cup molasses
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups boiling water
2 large eggs

FOR THE TOPPING:

1 recipe Sautéed Apples (see the sidebar at right)
Whipped cream (optional)

Butter and flour the sides (not the bottom) of a 9-inch round cake pan that's 3 inches deep, tapping out the excess flour. To make the butterscotch, in a small

saucepan, melt the 6 Tbs. butter and the brown sugar together, stirring for a smooth mixture. Pour the mixture into the cake pan and swirl it to cover the bottom.

Heat the oven to 300°F.

In a bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, salt, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves; set aside. Using the paddle attachment of an electric mixer, cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy; set aside.

With a fork, stir 1 tsp. of the baking soda vigorously into the molasses until the molasses has lightened somewhat and has changed in texture; this can take a minute or two. Add the molasses to the butter-sugar mixture and mix on medium until completely combined. Add the remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. baking soda to the boiling water. On low speed, alternately add the dry ingredients and the water to the butter-molasses mixture. Mix until just smooth. Finally, add the eggs one at a time, mixing to combine after each addition. The batter will be very thin.

Bake until the center of the cake is springy to the touch and a toothpick comes out clean, about 1 hour and 15 min. Let cool 5 min. and then invert the cake onto a serving plate. Let cool for an hour before serving; the cake will still be warm, which is how it's best.

Just before serving, sauté the apples, following the recipe at right. Let them cool slightly. Top the cake with the warm apples and serve with some whipped cream, if you like.





Two great ways to cook apples

Sauté apples for a quick and delicious topping for ice cream, cake, or crêpes.

The gingerbread at left is a perfect match for sautéed apples. But you can also serve sautéed apples with vanilla ice cream for a fantastic dessert that blows people away and yet is made in ten minutes. When sautéing apples, slice them thinly so they'll cook through on the inside in the time it

takes the outside to turn golden brown.

Sautéed Apples

Yields enough to top 1 cake, about 2 cups.

3 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. sugar
1¾ lb. apples (about 4 medium), peeled, quartered, cored, and sliced ¼ inch thick

In a large skillet, melt the butter and sugar. Increase the heat to medium high and add the apples; cook, tossing frequently, until browned, about 5 min.

Reduce apples to make a versatile purée.

Apple purée is easy to make, but it takes a few hours, so you might want to double or triple the recipe. It will keep in the freezer for months, and if the apples are really good, it's the best apple-sauce you'll ever taste. I like it on hot cereal and as a base for a sorbet, a fool, or a Bavarian cream. When cooking the apples, let them get good and brown; as

their sugars caramelize, the purée develops a deep, toasty flavor.

Apple Purée

Yields about 1 cup.

2½ lb. apples (about 6 medium), peeled, cored, and chopped
1 to 2 Tbs. water

In a heavy-based pan, cook the apples with the water over low heat, stirring often, until the fruit reduces to a slightly caramelized, thick purée, 1¼ to 2 hours.

Well-browned sautéed apples have the best flavor. Slice them thin so the insides cook in the time it takes the exteriors to brown.

Apple Brown Betty

The betty seems to bake taller when made with croissants, but most people are more likely to have day-old bread on hand than day-old croissants.

Yields one 8-inch cake.

4 cups ¾-inch pieces day-old bread, such as French or Italian, or day-old croissants

1¾ lb. apples (about 4 medium), peeled, cored, quartered, and cut in ¾-inch dice (to yield about 4 cups)

1 recipe Apple Purée (see sidebar above)
½ cup orange juice
½ cup plus 2 tsp. sugar
2½ tsp. ground cinnamon
⅓ cup raisins
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted

Heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour an 8-inch square or round cake pan.

Line the bottom of the pan with kitchen parchment or waxed paper.

In a large bowl, mix well with your hands the bread, apples, apple purée, orange juice, ½ cup of the sugar, 2 tsp. of the cinnamon, the raisins, and all but about 2 Tbs. of the melted butter. Press the mixture into the pan. Brush the top with the reserved melted butter and sprinkle with the remaining ½ tsp. cinnamon and 2 tsp. sugar. Bake until the top is golden and the sides are

bubbling, about 1 hour and 5 min. Cool in the pan at least 1 hour. Loosen the sides with a knife. Turn it out onto a flat plate or cutting board and then flip it back onto a serving dish so that the golden top is upright. If it doesn't come out, heat the bottom of the pan (only if it's metal) on the stove until you hear sizzling, about 30 seconds, and then try again. Serve warm.





Sierra Beauties (at right) are the author's favorite baking apples. If you like them, too, ask your market to stock them, as well as other less familiar varieties.

Buying the best apple for baking

Since apples are grown just about everywhere in the United States, it isn't difficult to find orchards and farmers' markets that feature apple varieties that you won't find at your average supermarket. Talk to the apple sellers. Tell them you're looking for a baking apple, one that holds its shape well and has a good balance of acid and sugar.

Tasting the apple is a good place to start, but your favorite baking

apples will likely be different from the ones you enjoy raw as a snack; they're generally more tart and less sweet. A low-acid, high-sugar variety, like Gala, is great fresh but becomes quite bland when baked. Rome Beauty, on the other hand, develops a more pronounced flavor when cooked.

These varieties are considered **good for baking**: Baldwin, Cortland, Golden Delicious, Gravenstein, Idared, Jon-

agold, Mutsu (also called Crispin), Newtown Pippin, Northern Spy, Rhode Island Greening, Rome Beauty, York Imperial.

Just as important as choosing apples that are good for baking is avoiding those that are not. These varieties are considered **bad for baking**: Gala, Jonathan, McIntosh, Macoun (but good for puréeing), and Red Delicious.

Then there are those apples that might hold their shape well but lack

flavor, or that have flavor but fall apart. While there's general consensus about the best and the worst baking apples, these apples fall somewhere **in between**: Braeburn, Empire, Fuji, and Granny Smith.

Finally, experiment with those varieties that you may never have heard of but that come highly recommended by a grower. Never heard of Black Gilliflower? Me neither, but supposedly it's great for baking.

Apple Crisp

You can make individual crisps by dividing the filling and topping among six ramekins or individual gratin dishes. Serve with heavy cream or a scoop of vanilla ice cream. *Serves six.*

FOR THE FILLING:

2½ lb. apples (about 6 medium), peeled, quartered, cored, and sliced to yield about 6 cups

2 to 3 Tbs. sugar

¼ tsp. ground cinnamon

1 Tbs. all-purpose flour

FOR THE CRISP TOPPING:

1 cup all-purpose flour

5 Tbs. brown sugar

2 Tbs. sugar

½ cup finely chopped nuts (I like pecans)

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces and chilled

Heat the oven to 350°F.

To make the filling—In a 9-inch pie pan that's 2 inches deep (or a similar baking pan), toss the apples with the sugar to taste, cinnamon, and flour.

To make the topping—In a medium bowl, mix

together all the topping ingredients with your fingers or a pastry cutter until small pebbly pieces of butter are distributed throughout the mixture. Sprinkle the entire mixture over the apples. Bake until the topping is golden and the fruit is bubbling and tender, about 1 hour and 15 min. for a large crisp and 1 hour for individual crisps. Cool slightly before serving.





Making turnovers assembly-line style.

Each turnover gets half an apple and some flour, sugar, and cinnamon to create a pie-like filling.



Molding the dough around the apple eliminates trapped air. Gently press on the dough close to the mound of apples.



A good seal keeps most of the apple juices in. Fold the bottom edge over the top and press to seal.



Flute for looks and security. The author prefers this scalloped edge to a forked edge because it holds this elastic dough together better.

Apple Turnovers

I also use this wonderful, flaky dough to make open-faced rustic tarts called galettes. If you don't want to make all of the turnovers at once, you can freeze some of the dough, well wrapped. Defrost in the refrigerator before rolling it out. *Yields 8 large turnovers.*

10 oz. (2¼ cups) all-purpose flour

1 tsp. sugar

½ tsp. salt

6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces and chilled

½ cup ice water

About 3 Tbs. all-purpose flour

About ¾ cup sugar

4 large apples (about 2 lb. total), peeled, halved, and cored; each half quartered lengthwise

About 1 tsp. ground cinnamon

2 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted

Sugar for sprinkling

In a mixing bowl, combine the 10 oz. flour, the 1 tsp. sugar, and the salt. Cut the butter into the flour mixture, using a pastry cutter or your fingers, until the butter bits are pea-size. (You can also use a food processor or a stand mixer, just be sure not to overmix the dough.) Add the water all at once and mix until the dough

just comes together. Divide the dough and shape it into two disks.

Cut each disk into quarters. With lightly floured hands, shape each quarter into a flat oval about 3 inches long and 2 inches wide. Cover the ovals with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least half an hour.

Line two baking sheets with kitchen parchment. Heat the oven to 400°F.

Flour a smooth work surface well. With a rolling pin, roll each piece of dough into a larger oval, approximately 10 inches long and 6 inches wide. The dough should be almost paper-thin. Brush off any excess flour.

Spoon 1 tsp. flour and 1 tsp. sugar on one half of each oval. Reassemble half an apple on each pile of flour and sugar. Sprinkle 2 tsp. sugar and a pinch of cinnamon over the apple.

Fold the other half of the oval over the apples so that it falls just shy of the edge of the bottom half.

Fold the edge of the bottom half up over the edge of the top half and press to seal. Flute the edge as you would a pie (see the photo above). Brush the top of the turnovers with the melted butter and sprinkle with additional sugar. Bake until golden brown, 45 to 50 min. Use a spatula to move the turnovers from the baking sheet to a cooling rack. These are best served warm but are also good at room temperature.



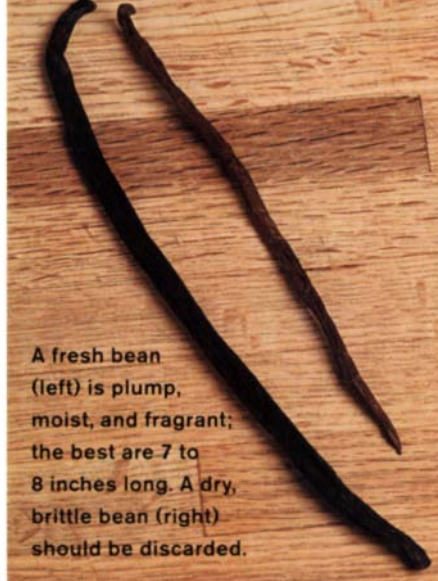
Kathleen Stewart runs the Downtown Bakery in Healdsburg, California. ♦

Choosing and using vanilla beans

If you want the purest, most intense vanilla flavor in your recipes, use whole vanilla beans rather than extract. The best-quality beans come from Mexico, Madagascar, and Indonesia.

If you have a choice at the market, choose beans that are plump and pliable. Squeeze the beans, if possible, to feel that they are dense, somewhat squishy and not at all brittle. Also give them a sniff if you can; the fragrance should be heady and unmistakably vanilla. Sometimes vanilla beans are speckled with a pale, whitish dust. This is simply crystallized vanillin—the substance that gives them their flavor—and is nothing to worry about. According to Penzeys Spices, the longer the bean, the better the flavor. Since fresh beans lose flavor and fragrance as they dry out, buy only what you need and shop at a market with good turnover.

Store vanilla beans in an airtight container in a cool, dark space along with your other spices. The small glass cylinders that some beans come in are ideal for storage, but a zip-top bag or an empty spice jar can work, too. (Fold the



Holding the bean flat with one hand, use a paring knife to split it in half lengthwise.



Use the dull side of the paring knife's blade to scrape the dark, moist pulp from the bean.

bean in half to store; if it's too brittle to fold, it's old.) Properly stored, vanilla beans will keep for two to three months.

The deepest vanilla flavor is found in the seeds—the dark, sticky pulp inside the bean. To extract the seeds, set the bean on a flat surface and follow the directions in the photos at right. Once you've extracted the seeds, there are a few ways to use them (and the scraped pod):

- ◆ **Infuse a liquid with the bean and seeds.** Drop the seeds and the scraped pod into warm liquid, such as scalded milk or cream, and leave them to infuse for at least 30 minutes and up to an hour. Strain the pod from the liquid (the tiny specks of vanilla seeds will remain). Use the flavored liquid for your recipe.

- ◆ **Alternatively, add the scraped seeds directly to a batter.** For example, add the seeds to the butter and sugar before creaming when making cookies.

- ◆ **Add a small piece of a split bean** (no need to scrape first) to a savory stew at the beginning of cooking. This is especially good in rich shellfish dishes or highly spiced meat dishes.

It's hard to give an exact conversion for replacing vanilla extract with vanilla bean in a recipe because beans vary in intensity. As a guideline, however, a 2-inch piece of vanilla bean (halved and scraped) equals about 1 teaspoon of pure vanilla extract.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ◆

Baking powder vs. baking soda

Two common leavening agents—baking soda and baking powder—have similar names and similar roles, but they also have significant differences.

Baking soda is a white soluble compound also known as sodium bicarbonate or bicarbonate of soda. It's extremely alkaline and will spur a chemical reaction that produces carbon-dioxide gas when mixed with an acid—or more simply, it creates bubbles

that cause a batter to rise. In order for baking soda to produce light, airy pancakes and muffins, the batter must have the correct amount of acidity (from buttermilk, yogurt, lemon juice, applesauce, vinegar, or honey, for example). If there isn't enough acidity in the batter (if you substitute fresh milk for buttermilk, for instance), the baking soda won't be converted to carbon-dioxide gas. The resulting batter won't rise

properly and the unconverted baking soda will leave behind an unpleasantly soapy taste.

Baking powder performs on the same principle of creating carbon-dioxide gas bubbles to raise baked goods, but unlike baking soda, baking powder contains its own catalyst for this reaction. Baking powder contains both baking soda and an acid so that it can

be mixed with any type of liquid and create its own

bubble-producing reaction.

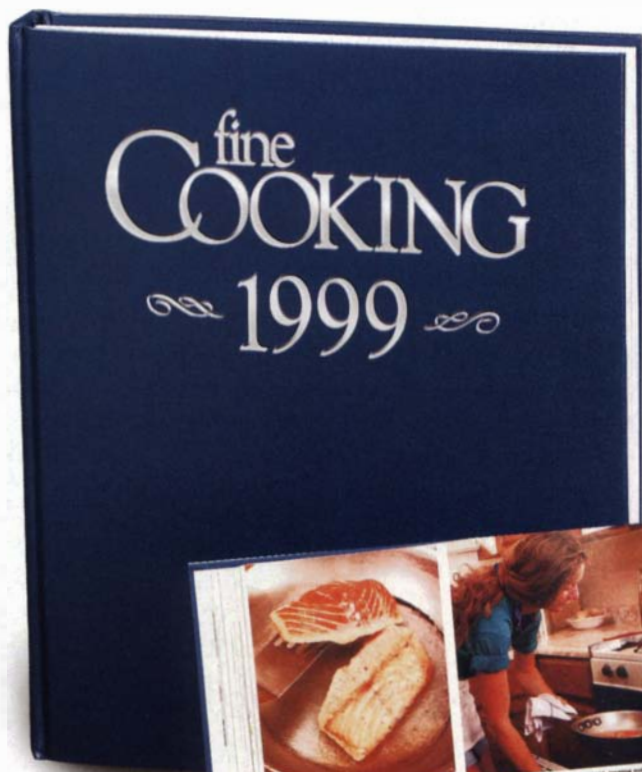
Double-acting baking powder is the most common baking powder on the market. It contains two types of acid (usually cream of tartar and sodium aluminum sulfate), one that reacts when the batter is first moistened, and one that reacts later in the heat of the oven. —M.S.



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Bake crisper pizza and bread with a baking stone



Despite all the high-tech equipment in kitchen shops today, one of the best tools for making better bread and pizza is still the decidedly low-tech flat stone. A bakingstone (also called a pizza stone) is a ceramic tile made from natural clay that's been pressed into a dense, flat shape (round, square, or rectangular) and kiln-fired at extremely high temperatures. Like the bricks that line chimneys, baking stones retain and radiate heat while remaining fireproof and resistant to warping or cracking. Cooks put the stone on the lowest rack of the oven (or directly on the floor of a gas oven) to replicate the brick floor of a traditional baker's oven.

There are three advantages to baking on a stone. First, when you're making breads and other leavened baked goods

that need an initial push of heat to rise properly (called oven spring), the hot surface of a stone provides a direct thrust of heat that the heated oven air can't. Second, in the case of doughs cooked directly on the hot stone, the stone's slightly porous surface draws moisture from the dough to produce a more definitive, crisp, and tasty bottom crust. At the same time, the stone disperses this moisture as steam, which promotes a lighter top crust. Finally, a thoroughly heated stone also provides a consistent source of radiant heat, despite fluctuations or hot spots in your oven.

This final reason is why many cooks leave a stone in the oven full-time. While its effects won't be as dramatic on foods that aren't cooked on the stone, it will promote a more even oven temperature.

A stone heats up slowly and cools down just as slowly, so to get the best results from your stone, put it in a cold oven, set the temperature, and wait for 30 to 45 minutes (or wait until 20 minutes after your oven reaches temperature) before baking on it. The thicker the stone, the longer it will take to heat up.

Unglazed quarry tiles (pavers) can make fine baking stones. Sold at tile distributors, they're inexpensive and provide a little more flexibility, but be sure to buy tiles that are unglazed and lead-free (the best guarantee is to buy American-made tiles, which are lead-free by law). As for size, you'll need to leave at least 1½ inches between the edges of the stone and the oven walls for air to circulate.

—M.S.

Photo: Judi Rutz

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Q&A

Happy Valley

Ranch (913/849-3103 or happyvalleyranch.com) sells

cider presses from \$299 to \$579, along with many accessories. **All Season's Homestead Helpers** (800/649-9147) sells the Jaffrey Cider & Wine Press for \$445.

You can order malted barley flour from **King Arthur Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836 or kingarthurfLOUR.com). **Bob's Red Mill** (800/553-2258, x224) also carries malted barley flour (20 oz. for \$2.33).

Silpat nonstick baking sheet liners are sold through many kitchen shops and catalogs, including **A Cook's Wares** (800/915-9788 or cookswares.com),

King Arthur (see left), and **Fante's** (800/443-2683). For other sources, or to find a store near you, call the manufacturer, **Demarle**, at 888/353-9726.

AT THE MARKET

For unusual strains of organic garlic, try **Filaree Farm** (509/422-6940) or **La Terre Garlic Farm** (800/909-2272 or laterregarlic.com).



THANKSGIVING

Wooden tart tampers, which cost about \$4, are often available at specialty baking stores, or else from **A Cook's Wares** (see left) or **Bridge Kitchenware** (800/274-3435 or bridgekitchenware.com).

To buy a specialty turkey, check your local market first. Many better grocery stores carry **Bell & Evans** turkeys. You can order free-range and organic turkeys from **D'Artagnan** (800/327-8246) or order specialty turkeys on the web from **Maple Lawn Farms** (maplelawn.com) and **Willie Bird** (williebird.com). **Empire Kosher** turkeys are sold in every state (see empirekosher.com for a store near you).

J.K. Adams (800/451-6118 or jkadams.com) also makes end-grain cutting boards. The rubber Sani-tuff cutting board is stocked mostly by restaurant-supply stores; try **J&S Kitchen Supply** in New York City (212/431-9112). The non-



slip cutting board safety pad made by **Griptex** is sold nationally at kitchen and housewares stores.

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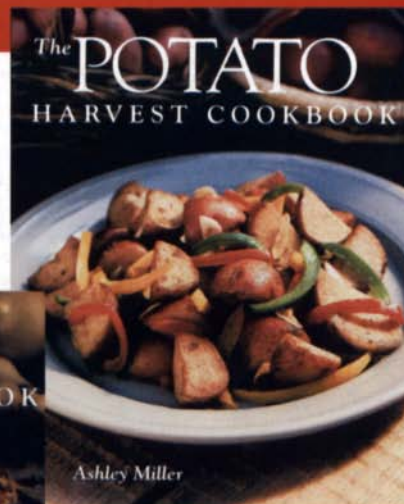
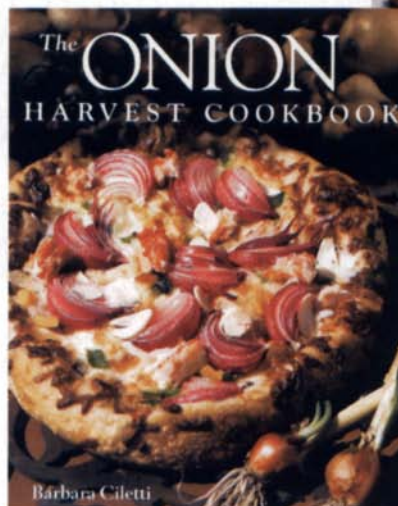
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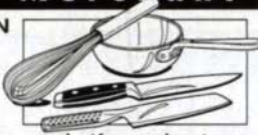
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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes (per serving unless noted)
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Classic Dinner Rolls	28	200	70	5	29	8	4	2	1	55	160	1	per roll
Lemon-Pepper Cheese Coins	44	20	10	0	2	1	1	0	0	5	25	0	per cheese coin
Cocktail Sauce	44	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	50	0	per tsp.
Cilantro Pesto	44	20	15	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	35	0	per tsp.
Marinated Olives	45	80	70	0	2	8	1	6	1	0	290	1	per 1/4 cup
Maple-Bacon-Glazed Turkey	45	640	290	74	9	32	10	11	7	220	260	0	based on 12 lb. turkey
Wild Rice & Cornbread Stuffing	45	370	200	6	38	22	13	6	1	75	730	3	per cup
Bourbon Gravy	45	70	40	1	5	4.5	1.5	2	1	5	300	0	per 1/4 cup
Sweet Potatoes with Horseradish	46	220	130	2	23	15	9	4	1	55	350	3	
Olive-Oil Braised Collards	47	160	90	6	15	10	1	7	1	0	370	10	
Gingery Cranberry-Pear Tartlets	47	140	50	1	22	6	3	2	0	25	20	1	per tartlet
Pecan Tartlets	48	230	130	3	24	14	5	7	2	65	75	1	per tartlet
Pumpkin Tartlets	48	130	80	2	13	8	5	2	0	50	50	1	per tartlet
Eggplant & Zucchini Compote	50	210	170	3	12	19	3	13	2	0	210	4	
Cabbage-Apple Compote	50	190	90	6	22	10	4	5	1	10	670	6	
Fennel & Onion Compote	51	240	170	3	19	19	2	13	2	0	310	4	
Calabrese Pork Ragù	54	600	180	45	57	20	8	9	2	120	960	4	w/1/2 Tbs. butter
Beef Ragù Chiantigiana	55	690	200	61	52	22	10	10	1	175	670	4	w/1/2 Tbs. butter
Asian Marinated Portabella "Steak"	58	320	290	3	8	32	5	8	17	0	520	2	w/o reserved marinade
Roasted Portabella & Garlic Sandwich	58	330	110	13	48	13	4	5	1	17	730	5	per sandwich
Sherry-Braised Portabellas w/Linguine	59	690	400	14	55	45	21	19	3	105	340	4	
Alsation Onion Tart	63	450	330	8	23	37	20	11	3	180	450	1	
Salmon, Mushroom & Dill Quiche	63	600	420	21	28	46	26	14	3	275	580	2	
Cabbage, Leek & Bacon Tart	64	660	490	15	29	54	29	19	4	220	860	2	
Spinach & Goat Cheese Quiche	64	630	460	16	28	51	31	15	2	300	490	2	
Sole & Scallop Timbales	67	600	460	25	8	51	31	15	3	235	650	1	per timbale
German Butter Cake	71	210	100	4	24	11	5	4	1	55	105	1	per slice (1/12 cake)
Cinnamon Chrysanthemums	71	360	140	4	52	15	9	4	1	80	220	1	per chrysanthemum
Russian Chocolate Braid	71	220	80	5	30	9	5	3	1	100	170	1	per slice (1/12 braid)
Gingerbread with Sautéed Apples	78	470	160	4	76	17	10	5	1	80	260	3	per serving w/o cream
Apple Brown Betty	79	280	110	2	44	13	7	4	1	30	65	4	per slice (1/12 cake)
Apple Crisp	80	470	210	4	66	23	10	9	2	40	5	5	
Apple Turnovers	81	470	190	4	70	21	13	6	1	55	150	3	per turnover
Green Chile & Cheese Quesadilla	94	480	290	16	31	32	12	9	10	50	820	1	per quesadilla

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

Quick Quesadillas with a Green Chile Kick



Green Chile & Cheese Quesadilla

The ingredient list is very flexible—choose whatever cheeses and herbs you like and then garnish with almost any tasty leftovers. The important thing is to arrange all the ingredients and equipment ahead, because once you start frying, things move really quickly. To reduce the amount of oil, just fry one side of the tortilla, adding the filling to the unfried side. The result won't be quite as crisp and puffy, but it will be less rich. *Amounts below make enough to fill one 9½-inch quesadilla.*

- 2 Tbs. vegetable or olive oil**
- 1 large flour tortilla (about 9½ inches)**
- A generous ¼ cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese**
- 2 Tbs. crumbled feta cheese**
- 2 Tbs. green chile salsa or your favorite salsa, plus more for dipping**
- 2 Tbs. roughly chopped fresh cilantro**
- OPTIONAL INGREDIENTS:**
 - ♦ ¼ cup shredded leftover roasted, grilled, or barbecued chicken
 - ♦ 2 Tbs. chopped tomatoes
 - ♦ 2 Tbs. corn kernels
 - ♦ 2 Tbs. cooked black, white, or pinto beans
 - ♦ ¼ cup diced or sliced avocado
 - ♦ 1 egg, scrambled
 - ♦ ¼ cup mashed potatoes

Arrange all your ingredients so that they'll be easy to add to the quesadilla. Lay several layers of paper towel on a work surface, and have a rack and tongs ready.

Heat a large skillet (just a bit larger than the tortilla) until it's very hot, add the oil, and when it's very hot (but not quite smoking), lay the tortilla in the oil. Cook until the underside is slightly blistered and light brown, about 20 seconds. Lift the tortilla with the tongs, hold it over the pan to let most of the oil drip back in (if you like, lay it on the paper towels for a second to blot even more oil). Put the tortilla back in the pan, uncooked side down.

Quickly distribute the filling ingredients evenly over the tortilla. It will puff up in places, but that's fine. When the second side of the tortilla is browned and crisp but still pliable, fold the tortilla in half with the tongs, transfer it to the paper towels, blot for a few seconds, and then transfer to the cooling rack while you make the next. Cut into wedges and serve immediately, with more salsa if you like.

Quesadillas have been welcome guests at my dinner table ever since my college days because they're simultaneously comforting (think grilled cheese sandwich) and exciting (think zingy salsa and fragrant cilantro). A quesadilla is also remarkably quick, and as long as I've got a pack of flour tortillas in the fridge or freezer, I can always count on having something on hand to use as a filling.

You'll want to have some kind of cheese as the melty, savory base, but once that's in place, the rest of the filling is up to you and your leftovers. (By the way, my style of quesadilla is by no means authentic Mexican. I'm just borrowing the name to describe my own version of something folded up in a fried tortilla.)

I love the combo of Monterey Jack, feta, fresh cilantro, and a mild green chile salsa that I buy at the supermarket (one brand I like is called Valley of Mexico), but red salsas are delicious, too. I've

made quesadillas with avocados, shredded chicken (leftover barbecued chicken is killer), chopped tomatoes, roasted peppers. I also make some odd-sounding combinations, tried initially out of desperation, but subsequently repeated by choice: scrambled eggs or mashed potatoes taste great with my standard base of cheese, green chile, and cilantro.

A quesadilla and a simple salad make a fine supper or lunch, but I also make quesadillas as a hot hors d'oeuvre for parties; I just use smaller tortillas. I make an effort to get all my ingredients shredded, chopped, and organized (which you need to do even for a single serving), and then it's really easy to fire off a few quesadillas once the guests arrive. I cut them into small wedges and arrange them on a platter around a bowl of salsa for dipping.

Martha Holmberg is the editor of Fine Cooking. ♦



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READER SERVICE NO. 44



Perfecting a Loaf of Bread

Chad Robertson started out making many different kinds of breads at Bay Village, the tiny bakery he owns with his wife, Elizabeth Prueitt, in Point Reyes Station, California. But obsession prevailed, and Robertson decided to focus solely on *pain au levain*, a traditional sourdough leavened with a natural starter that he refreshes, or “feeds,” up to four times a day.

Robertson’s approach is traditionally called *à deux mains* (“with two hands”), where a batch of dough is mixed, kneaded, shaped, proofed, and baked by the same baker, instead of being passed off to several different pairs of hands, as is often the case. This allows “a profound connection to the dough,” affirms Robertson. “I can make adjustments all through the day, because I know



Photos: Daniel Proctor

exactly what I started with.” The result is bread with a chewy, well-caramelized crust, a moist, tender crumb, and a perfect balance of naturally sour and sweet flavors—“bread,” Robertson says, “that I love to eat.”

1 The dough is mixed by machine, with a European diving-arm mixer that simulates the gentle kneading motion of human hands.

2 Proofing baskets in which the dough will rise get a dusting of flour. A long rest and rise contribute to bread that’s tender, not tough.

3 This dough is ready for baking. It’s quite wet, which gives a moist, flavorful loaf that stays fresh for several days.

4 The finished bread is beautifully browned and thoroughly baked but not dried out, thanks to the penetrating heat of a wood-fired oven.